

The Warm Heart of Africa

*by
Ann Thiesen*

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Publisher's Statement

I have known of John and Ann Thiesen's work in Malawi for a number of years but it was only when they moved to Mobile, AL to work with their sponsoring church, the Pleasant Valley Church of Christ, that I met them personally. That meeting, and getting better acquainted subsequently, has led to the printing of this book, written by Ann from her diaries, telling of their years of work in the country of Malawi in the Southern part of Africa. To give you some background information, Malawi is bordered on the west by Zambia, on the north by Tanzania, and on the south by Mozambique. Most of its eastern border is covered by Lake Malawi. It has a population of around 10 million. The capital is Lilongwe and the largest city is Blantyre. Languages include English and Chichewa, the national language. Seventy-five percent of the people believe in Christ.

The Lord's church has been in this country for most of the 20th Century. In more recent times, Andrew Connally, James D. Judd, Doyle Gilliam, and John Thiesen, with their families, along with numerous others, have spread the work greatly. It is estimated that there are more than 2,000 congregations and 100,000 members in the country, with 2,000 about local preachers. Malawi has proven to be a very fruitful field for the Lord's church.

With so much interest among the people in spiritual things, there is a great need for literature. Here in the States we publish a quarterly magazine, The Voice of Truth International, of which we also print an edition for Malawi. Brother John Thiesen is one of our staff writers and helps with distributing the magazine to the different areas of the country.

We are grateful to John and Ann and their family for the many years of service to Malawi. Thank you, Ann, for writing the story of your work and for sharing so many things about your home life and your involvement there in the Lord's work.

J.C. Choate
Winona, MS
June 24, 1998

Dedication

I want to dedicate this book to my dear husband, John, without whom I could not have gone to Africa to serve a warm-hearted people.

And,

To my five children: Henry, Michael, Robin, Mark and Kimberly who brought such happiness to our African bush home.

And,

To my dear mother, Clara Swanigan and late father, Ova Swanigan, who helped me to grow up to be a missionary's wife.

Introduction

When I first sat down to write this book, I was doing it for my children. I wanted to keep alive in their memories many of the events that we had experienced together during their growing-up years when we had lived as a missionary family in Africa. I also wanted the record to be passed down to their children and grandchildren so that they would have an idea of how their parents and grandparents had lived in that faraway land.

And then I thought of all those congregations and individuals who had supported our work in Malawi for so many years and made it possible for us to go time and again. I felt it would be important to make copies available so that we could share with them the joys we had experienced because of their love for souls in foreign places.

Finally, it dawned on me that there may be other Christian women out there who, as I was, are thinking of going with their husbands to a mission field but who have some fears or misgivings about living in a strange land far from home. If I could communicate to them the rewarding life I had experienced in Malawi, even though I first went over with the same fears, maybe it could help them to look beyond the "culture shock" to the joys of carrying Christ to a people of another land.

I want to thank J.C. and Betty Choate who have seen in my book a seed of encouragement to other women contemplating going to a foreign mission field with their husbands. By graciously agreeing to read the manuscript, and by accepting it for publication, they have fulfilled my hope of this book being made available to all those mentioned above.

Ann Thiesen

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My New Bush Home

As I tossed and turned last night in my bed and thought about my bush home in Africa, I thought I must try to put these words on paper to help refresh my children's memories of their lives there in that deep, dark continent so far away from home and family in the U.S.A. I also want to let my grandchildren know how their grandparents lived for approximately 23 years.

I want to start my story back in the year 1968 when my husband, John, read an article in *Firm Foundation* telling of the need for a missionary at Rumphu in Malawi, a very small country in central East Africa, land-locked by the surrounding countries of Zambia, Tanzania, Rhodesia (at that time) and Mozambique. My husband had always had a burning desire to carry the gospel to a place where others couldn't or wouldn't go.

He began corresponding with James Judd, one of the missionaries in Malawi. After some months, brother Judd came back to the States, called John and said, "Pick me up at the airport. I want to tell you about Malawi." Little did I dream how that visit would change the course of my family's life. Jim came in with a flurry of excitement about him, telling us what a great life it would be and how many souls were just waiting to be told the truth so they could be saved. Nothing could have sounded better to our ears. We both became very excited and discussed when would be the best time to go.

At the time I was very much pregnant with our fourth child, Mark. Jim suggested waiting until the baby was six months old before we left. He took John with him for one month of traveling in the southern States where most of the supporters of the



James Judd (right) delivering mission medicines to John. Jim flew all the way to Missouri to recruit us from Malawi.

Malawi work were so that John could meet the brethren and they could get to know him, especially the Pleasant Valley Road Church of Christ in Mobile, Alabama which was, and still is, the sponsoring congregation. After a whirlwind trip of these churches, John returned home to Clinton, Missouri, tired but very elated and ready to go to Africa.

Preparing to go

Naturally, parents on both sides were really against the move. I'll admit I was beginning to wonder what I had let myself in for. Reality was beginning to set in, especially as we drove the 75 miles every week to Kansas City to get tons of injections as preventive measures against smallpox, typhoid, yellow fever and boosters of all sorts. It seemed they were never-ending. After the typhoid shots our arms turned blue, green and black almost to the

elbow. If someone in the family bumped the other one, accidentally or on purpose, we cried out in pain. I began to wonder to myself as I prepared my children (we had four: one girl and three boys), my husband and myself for the move, "What have I let myself in for?" It was too late to back out now. We had told the Lord we'd go if we



Our family passport picture when we first went to Malawi in 1969.

could, and our brethren were counting on us. There was no reason good enough for me to back out. No, the only way was to go forward, and that led to Africa.

After what seemed like hundreds of injections, and our arms had taken back their normal color (we thought they never would) and the pain had subsided, we started packing bags and bags and more bags. We bade our families good-by, which was a very hard thing to do. Some good friends, Ralph and Trudi Martin, took us to the Kansas City airport on January 16, 1969 during a very bad, swirling snowstorm with several inches already on the ground, although the plane was still able to take off.

The trip was uneventful on the way over. However, the closer we got to Malawi, the more apprehensive I became. What would life be like for me and my family in this new land so different from mine? I was raised a farm girl in the middle of the

beautiful Ozark Mountains of Missouri and had never been out of the States, and now here I was circling the Blantyre airport halfway around the world from where I was brought up.

Arrival in Malawi

As I looked down, I could not believe the beauty of that country. It was like watching a technicolor movie. Everything was breathtakingly green. I saw round, square, and rectangular huts with thatched roofs in the beautiful sunshine, but no people. I thought, "Where is everyone?" I did not realize then that my eyes just were not trained to see the people everywhere.

As we came off the plane at the Blantyre airport, the first big sign I saw scared me half to death. It said, "Your dress must cover your knees as you stand up, and no trousers are allowed on ladies here." I looked down, and there were my fat knees showing for all to see, and there were several policemen around! I was desperately trying to hold my tummy in and pull my skirt down over my knees. I knew I was going to be hauled off to jail on the very first day of my arrival. I could see the headlines: "New missionary's wife detained in prison for showing fat knees in public." What a good example I was! Fortunately, the police looked the other way, and I hurriedly climbed in the car with the missionaries in the country who had met our plane.

It was our first time to meet the Doyle Gilliam family, the Lendal Wilks family and the B. Shelburn family. The Gilliam family took us to their house where we stayed for the next two weeks getting things bought and prepared for our 500 mile trip to the North to our new bush home where, although we did not know it at that time, we would spend off and on the next 23 years of our lives.

The two weeks spent with the Gilliams were a wonderful two weeks. They taught us many things about the people and the cus-

toms, trying to help us not make mistakes. Louise warned us to take preventatives to keep from getting malaria fever, and that just scared me half to death. I thought, "I've got four children to protect from malaria!" She told me the preventatives aren't one hundred percent effective, either. I was very determined that my kids would not catch this dreadful disease if I had to kill every malaria-carrying mosquito around. I found out soon that was impossible.

She also told me about a certain fly that lays its eggs in your wet clothes on the line. Then, when you wear that garment or dry with that towel, the eggs will bury in your skin and hatch into worms. I told her I would handle that problem by hanging all my clothes in the house. We couldn't have a dryer because there was no electricity. Needless to say, I was thoroughly worried sick. She said, "Just iron all your clothes, towels, wash cloths, underwear, and even socks, and that will kill all eggs." So that's what we did.

After two weeks we had accumulated groceries, rain coats, umbrellas, medicines and many other necessary items, including a new Land Rover, a British four-wheel-drive vehicle similar to a Jeep which the missionaries recommended for our stay in the northern part of Malawi where we would be for at least three years. There were no blacktop roads at that time. All we had to travel on were dirt roads and more dirt roads. Now we were finally ready for the 500 mile trip to the North.

Oh, were we excited! I could not wait to get to my African bush home. I thought, "I'll fix my home beautifully. I'll be a good mother and take care of my kids in spite of the diseases I've heard about, and I'll do what I can to be a good example and a good missionary's wife." Over the next several years there were so many things I would be expected to do that I had never dreamed I could do, such as treating very sick, malnourished children, tropical ulcers, malaria, the common cold, snake bites,

carrying women in our vehicle to the hospital who were in heavy labor and dead bodies to their homes for burial, including dead children. This was the hardest of all.

The trip north

It was decided among the missionaries that Doyle Gilliam should escort us on the long trip north, showing us how to drive on the left side of the road. So off we started on that long, tiring and very bumpy road to our new home in the bush. Doyle drove first, the Landrover wandering here and there over the road trying to dodge the many pot holes scattered in both lanes and the middle. He drove on and on, while we watched both sides, hoping to catch a glimpse of a wild animal. After some hours, John took his turn and did a fine job driving on the left side of the road.



Going north in our tough 4-wheel-drive British Landrover.

After a while, Doyle suggested I take a turn to see how I could do. I really tried, but that Landrover was so big and heavy for me and had a mind of its own. It decided it wanted to go into the ditch on the left side, so I decided (along with John and Doyle) that I would learn on another day. That was a very nerve-racking time for me. I never dreamed I would eventually even learn to change a tire on that monstrosity. I found over the years ahead that, with the Lord's help, I could do what had to be done.

As we drew closer to the Northern Region the road became rougher, if that was possible, and muddier. We were supposed to go by a certain village and pick up Lackwell Nyirenda so that, after we were settled in, he could travel with John to introduce him to the churches in the north. There were approximately 48 Churches of Christ which John wanted to visit in order to meet the brethren. However, the road was covered by water and impassable, so we had to take a different route to the mission.

Lubagha Mission

After two full days of hard travelling, seven of us tired, weary but happy travelers pulled into Lubagha Mission with a very red, mud splattered Landrover. But we had arrived, and that was what was important. It was so dark I couldn't see my hand in front of me, but the sky was dotted with millions of twinkling stars looking down at us. Doyle said that Mofati, the man who was looking after the mission, would come soon. He was the "Kapitao" or foreman of the mission, over the other workers and grasscutters. Sure enough, in a few short minutes, here he came swinging his arms in a big hurry to help us get in the house (he had the key) and get us settled in. He was carrying his family's own nyali, a little hurricane lantern. It didn't give much light at all, but it was better than nothing.

Oh, but that house was dark! There were no switches to flick to fill that dark house with light. We all were tired and dirty from

way to heat it. I crept into the dark kitchen with a candle, and a wood stove over in the corner stared back at me. How could I heat water on that! I was tired, and I didn't know how to build a fire in that thing.

The whole family was wondering about food too. I just wanted to go to bed. Maybe things would look better tomorrow. But I found a little of this and a little of that to put on the table, so we all would be satisfied for the evening. I opened a tin of margarine, set it next to the lantern and found bread to put on the table. When I turned around, it was literally covered by green stink bugs. Doyle said, "That will just add flavor." I thought, "this is a very strange missionary!" I learned over the years in that different kind of a land that this was the way to look at it and that you could have a lot of really good laughs. After all, our purpose for being here was the most important reason on earth. But I'll admit that on that night I didn't see it that way.



My beautiful bush home for 23 years.



Michael and the wood-burning cookstove that defeated me.

Mofati kept hanging around all evening trying to help us. I could hardly understand a word of his broken English. However over the years that followed, he with his broken English and I with my limited Chitumbuka, could communicate on most any subject. He would not stop until he got his message across. He became a good, loyal friend over the years whom we trusted with our house and everything in it. Supper over and dishes stacked for washing on the morrow, I wearily started trying to find sheets and bedding to get everyone tucked in for the night. After this was all accomplished, and cold sponge baths were over, we bedded down for the night. I didn't pay much attention to the noises of the night because I was soon sound asleep.

First impressions

It seemed morning came very early the next day, but I was anxious to be up and about. I wanted to see what my new house

looked like. As I looked around, I found two bedrooms, a bath, a large living room, a breezeway and a small kitchen. The walls were smoke-covered and dirty, the floors were red cement and the kitchen walls were literally black from the smoke from the old wood stove and the hurricane lanterns that had been used over the years. The curtains hung from the windows like limp, wrung-out dish rags. I told myself, "How can I live in a place like this? It's the end of the world and so much to do to get this house in a halfway livable condition." My thoughts that day were, "I must go back home. I can't stay here." Meanwhile, though, I started to unpack, trying to get things sorted out.

Time was limited, however, because people kept coming throughout the day to greet us and welcome us to Lubagha Mission. There were African children who came to see the bazungu (white) children. There weren't any other white children in the whole area. In fact, my children and I were a real novelty to the



Mike and Henry playing soccer in our front yard
with boys from Lubagha Village.

African women and children. They wanted to touch our kids' hair because it looked so different. They would come and stare at us for hours. So that they would leave, Mofati had to tell them that it wasn't our custom to have people stare at us. Some of the African boys, Filipo, McCloud, Chituzi, Chabwino, and Samuel became regular visitors to the Mission. On our first day there, they pretended they didn't know any English, so our boys Henry and Michael were using sign language and any other way possible trying to communicate with them. Then they laughed and started speaking English quite well.

One of the games they were playing was "football" (soccer). Over the years they had many a good game of soccer with our children in our front yard, which was why there was a great lack of flowers there. We were so shocked at the poverty of those people. One of the boys who was playing did not have any clothes at all, but held an old worn-out blanket around himself while he tried to play soccer. But our boys soon came to the rescue. They begged, "Mom, can we please give him some of our clothes?" So, over the years, they truly learned the meaning of the word "share". My heart really ached for the malnourished children who came to our door with various needs.

At the close of the long first day on that isolated mission in the remote heart of Africa, I went outside and looked at the beautiful mountains which surround the gorgeous Henga Valley that was to be our home for the next three years. I thought to myself, "So lovely, so beautiful, but I can never stay here." It was just too lonely, too isolated, too far away from my mom and dad, my brothers and sisters. I thought, "Dear God, what have I done?" That night in our bedroom, I told John, "The church at Pleasant Valley has wasted their money, they must take me home. I absolutely can not stay here." He just looked at me and did not say much of anything, because his heart had already been captured that very first day. He had already seen a field ready to

plant seed. Little did I know that shortly my heart also would be captured forever.

Our four children, especially our two older boys, Henry and Michael, were as excited as a bunch of monkeys in an unguarded maize field. From that very first day they started to live the life of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer.

Left by ourselves

After Doyle had spent three days helping us settle in and teaching us how to light the kerosene refrigerator and Petromax lamps, he had to take his leave of us and return to his family and work. We all piled in our new Landrover and drove the 50 miles of bumpy road to take him to the tiny town of Mzuzu to catch the plane back to Blantyre. As his airplane taxied down the runway, we felt deserted. We were truly on our own now. My, how we hated for him to leave!

John, the kids, and I decided to go to the shops to buy a few groceries we needed. The only problem was, many things had different names than we were used to. We would ask for cookies and they didn't have any, but we found them on the shelf by the name of "biscuits." Candy was "sweets," and I really wanted corn meal but went home without it because they didn't have any. I found out later it was called "ufu." I also found out hamburger meat was called "mince meat." Of course, that made no difference since you had to grind your own if you had any.

First worship service

The days went by and the first day of the week rolled around. It was time to go for worship, and we walked down the slope to the church building. The Malawians said to come at 9:00 A.M. So we were all prepared and arrived promptly at the set time. We didn't see a person around. We waited, waited, and waited. Finally, at 10:00 o'clock the people started to come. They

explained to us that they always told the Africans to be there at 9:00 so that they would be there by 10:00. They said there were two types of time. There was European time (white man's time) and African time. They were always at least an hour behind us. Very few had a watch, and so everybody told time by the sun.

As we worshipped that day I began to feel more at home. However, we noticed as we went in that the men all sat on the right side of the building and the women on the left. John started to sit with the men too, but they told him, "No, you sit with your family, because that is your custom." We found that customs are highly respected in that country and very much a part of their culture. We learned that we must respect their customs and not try to put our American ways on them.

The worship that day is one I shall never forget. The songs in the Chitumbuka tongue were absolutely beautiful. They were so spirited and sung with such feeling, and I was able to recognize the tune to many of the songs they were singing. They had called a meeting of all the churches in the North, so the building was overflowing with people. A welcome address was read to us from the pulpit. It was so heart-touching, it brought tears to my eyes. I will never forget it. One phrase that had been put in it by some of the English speakers was, "It would be just a hard nut to crack to really show our happiness by a word of mouth." The problem was to put that phrase "tough nut to crack" into Chitumbuka so that all could understand the meaning. This drew a lot of chuckles from all over the audience. They never were able to translate the phrase into their language.

As we sat there I looked around at the building and up at the uncovered rafters of the ceiling where I saw a large forest rat running back and forth having a fun time during our worship. On another occasion I saw a snake hanging from the same rafters above the preacher's head while he was speaking. He didn't seem to mind, and that was fine by me—as long as the snake

stayed up there! However, preachers did keep a watchful eye on wasps which visited our services quite often. I might add that, at that time, our building at Lubagha Mission was the best the Church of Christ had in the North.

That day, the contribution was the strangest I'd ever seen. Some of the brethren put in a few peanuts, some a couple of eggs, many of them put in several ears of maize (corn). There were some who put in five pence and took out four. I knew they were giving as they had prospered, but it was all so strange and foreign to me.

I was really shocked when it came time to remember the Lord's death in Communion. The bread was home-made. I made it through that just fine, but as they started passing the wine, I sort of went into shock. Where was the Welch's? This was wine for sure! Is this Scriptural? I was always terrified of anything with alcohol in it. It was explained to me that the brethren did not have refrigerators in which to keep grape juice, but wine would keep for several weeks without spoiling. Water was also added before the service to dilute it.

Later, John sent me to buy several cases of wine for the churches at McConnell's, a wholesale shop in Mzuzu. As I entered, it was overflowing with people who seemed to be just watching me as I told the shop clerk I needed some cases of wine. The clerk said "Come back and see what we have." Two of our preachers, Kemelton Harawa and Christone Chisiza, were with me. As the salesman led us to the back of the store to search for the cheapest-priced wine, he looked at me and asked, "Are you having a party?" I'd never felt so embarrassed in my life. I explained, "No, this is for the Lord's Supper. We remember Christ's death every Sunday." It seemed to me that he looked at me and thought, "That's the best story I've heard yet!" I hurriedly got my bottles of wine and left the shop with my face red and my ears burning. I knew then why John had sent me on that

errand. Well, we had to do the same thing many times over the next 23 years, and I never did get over the embarrassment of it.

That first Sunday afternoon on the mission, many of the African brethren came to visit us and to welcome us to the country. One was Kemelton Harawa, who became one of the best friends we've ever had.

Settling in

The first week after Sunday we began to find out how busy life could be. We had a terrible time trying to keep the kerosene Petromax lamps working so we could have light at night. John would sometimes work for hours on one of those things just hoping to get it working before sundown. Sometimes, in fact most of the time, they would shoot fire through the screen in the breezeway where we lit them, scaring us half to death and melting holes in the screen. John learned all the fine mechanics of the pressure lamps. After they were lit, we still had to hold our Bible, book or magazine right up against them in order to read by them. As John started his travels visiting the churches and being gone for up to ten days at a time, the kids and I would just use candles at night to save ourselves from maybe being blown out of existence by those Petromax lamps.

Also during this time I was trying to learn to use the wood-burning cookstove. My, what a chore! I could not make a decent fire so all meals were late by two hours or more. The biscuits all had black bottoms and tops and doughy middles. I couldn't buy any bread in the shops at the time. There was a little dinky town named Mhuju two miles away where they had a scone and tea house. I sent Henry and Michael to buy some scones (rolls) so that I wouldn't have to bake bread on that broken-down woodstove. They brought some home, but they were so full of bugs I couldn't bring myself to serve them to my family. It was back to black bottoms and tops and doughy middles. I knew John would



New, modern gas stove enters my humble little kitchen.

get tired of those in a hurry and would make other cooking arrangements for me. Sure enough, he did. He found some little Israel burners somewhere. I remember trying to keep the little burner holes open in them by pricking them with a small wire in order for the pressurized fuel to pass through to the fire, but there was no way to adjust the flame. As a result John still wasn't getting very good meals. I thought, "He won't keep me using these long, because his food is too important to him."

Sure enough, he heard of an American who had a propane gas stove for sale. He also found he could buy propane in Mzuzu. Needless to say, very soon I had a gas stove sitting in my kitchen. Things started going better in the kitchen and John and the kids started having their meals on time. What a joy it was just to stick a little match to the burner and watch a beautiful blue flame jump and dance on it without going out. God was really blessing us.



John's Office

We really learned what a great blessing it was to have a stove and lights. I called some African women in to see my gas stove, and they all marvelled at it. They thought it was magic. There was no wood burning, yet fire was coming out of those little holes on

top of the stove! They couldn't believe how I could turn it on and off at will. In fact, it even seemed a bit like magic to me.

A new way of driving

After the first two weeks I told John I needed to go to the shops in Mzuzu to get some things I had missed on the previous trip. I learned fast after that to have everything on my list, as 50 miles was a long way to go for something forgotten. We arose early Monday morning to head for Mzuzu, along with many Africans who had somehow read our minds that we were going and pleaded to go with us. We were as crowded as sardines in a tin. It had rained all the night before and since we weren't used



Workers smoothing mission road with hoes.

to what the rain could do to a dirt road, were we surprised! We found the roads almost impossible to navigate. Our Landrover actually went down the road sideways. John didn't dare stop the car, for we knew we would never get it moving again. We found ruts as deep as your waist and I was terrified that we would disappear in one of them, never to be seen again.

As we approached the hills of Ekwendeni and all that red, gooey clay, I got a stomach ache dreading what lay ahead for us. Did I really need those things that I had set out for that much?

John put the heavy-duty Landrover in 4-wheel-drive and said, "Hold onto your seats, we're going through," and so we did. On one side was a big Malawi bus buried deep in mud with all the passengers sitting out alongside the road hoping for a ride or, if that failed, to try to push the bus out as soon as it dried up a bit. Somehow we made it through and reached Mzuzu where we went from shop to shop buying what we could find. John spent 1 1/2 hours in the bank trying to deposit American checks and to withdraw Malawi pounds and shillings. Later on we would have Kwachas and Tambalas in the country.

After spending several hours there and eating in the "Mzuzu Club" a good meal of tough "black steak and chips," we started trying to round up the Malawians who had come with us in order to head for home. We reached home at dark, tired and weary. Now time to try and get those dilapidated Petromax lamps to work. But we were thankful, because that day we had got the best of those muddy roads. We were learning a new way of driving: if we couldn't go straight ahead, we'd go sideways.

Our Life on Lubagha Mission

During one of the first of John's many preaching trips, some of the grass cutters on the mission came running to me begging for munkwara (medicine) because one of them had been bitten by a snake. I thought, "Oh, I have never treated anything other than colds or sores. What do I do!" Everyone was looking to me for help. We only had one car and John was gone in it. So I grabbed my snake-bite kit, ran down the hill and there was Watson Ndhlovu in pain, lying down in the middle of the path. I knew that if I didn't act quickly there was a good possibility he could die, because we had so many poisonous snakes on the mission, such as both black and green mambas, cobras, and puff adders.

I grabbed my hypodermic needle, anti-venom ampoules and instructions on how to use them and started to read these in a desperate attempt to understand. I thought, "How can I comprehend all these instructions with my heart pounding and jumping in my chest like this?" I prayed God would help me to do this right. The instructions said to insert the first injection at the site of the bite. Well, I tried—I really did. But his foot was so tough that the needle bent and would not go in, so I put it in up above in the muscle of his leg. He never flinched, hollered or anything, so I gave him two injections and told them to let him lie there for a while. But they picked him up and carried him home. He survived and was cutting grass in a few days. I just prayed John would be home next time and take his turn if this happened again.

Shortly thereafter we had a hair-raising experience that scared me so much that I almost had cardiac arrest at the tender age of 28 years. A huge black cobra decided to pay an unwelcome visit to my humble little kitchen. I knew there was not room enough for the two of us in that kitchen. The kids, John and

I ran into the living room, shut the door and peeked out the window. Only the breezeway separated us from the horrible looking critter that raised his ugly head with black, beady eyes trying to stare us down. His head kept appearing and disappearing as he looked around the door, just daring us to enter the kitchen. I started screaming, "Go get Mofati, someone!" So one of the boys ran out the other door to go find Mofati, the mission's official snake killer.

Mofati came as quickly as possible with a huge spear (for



elephants, I supposed) and went right into that kitchen like nobody's business. I just knew Mofati, our dear Kapitao, was going to die that day. But after some terrible noises and a lot of goings on, out came Mofati with a huge grin on his face and a very dead cobra draped over that elephant spear. He later said he had special munkwara (medicine) so that a snake could not bite him, and that day I sort of believed it.

Mofati and the cobra that visited my kitchen.

After all of that, I said, "God does not want me in this place. I was meant to stay in America." I just knew that John would take me home, that he would not keep me in a place where cobras paid visits to my kitchen. I knew our elders would not want me there either. But John never even told our elders, and so I decided I'd try to make the best of a bad situation. I will admit the people were just wonderful, and we were beginning to love our new spiritual family more every day even though our skin was such a lighter colour than theirs and our customs vastly different. So many of them loved the same God we did, and those who didn't know Christ were literally begging to be taught.

School days

The weeks were really flying by and, as much as I dreaded it, it was time to get out the old school books from the Calvert Course and start teaching Henry and Michael. Robin and Mark



School in session with Mike and Robin while Mark looks on.

were still too young to start. My, that was really something to be thankful for, since I had barely settled in. I had never taught a day in my life, and I certainly didn't have a teaching degree. But the only way I knew was to get out the syllabus and books and plow right in. I found that where there is a will, there is a way. I will admit that one of the hardest things I ever did was to teach my children every day, week in and week out. I didn't ever have to force the kids, but myself. I thought, "Well, this is only for three years and then they'll be back in school in the States." I never dreamed I'd be doing this over a twenty-three year period. My patience grew by leaps and bounds, so God knew I would grow as a Christian by being in this situation. I really appreciated John's encouragement. He said, "Columbia Ann, this is how you can serve the Lord. Now I can be free to preach in Malawi where there are no schools near." I always felt better after that.

Mofati becomes my guard

When we first arrived in the country I had many misconceptions as to how it would be. I envisioned leopards, lions, elephants and anything else you can think of as dangerous roaming my front yard hunting for white human meat with the Thiesens specifically in mind. My dad had warned me that I would end up in a big pot of stew! Even though I doubted this, I still had a small inkling of fear that this might come to pass, so I asked John, just to be on the safe side, that he please get me a guard for the times he was to be gone at night.

John told Mofati my fears of being alone and Mofati said, "I will come and be the guard myself." He offered to stay in the ground nut house out back so that "if the Dona needs me, I will be near." I will never forget the first night he came when John was away. I heard someone at the breezeway door saying, "Odi, Odi." I thought to myself, "Oh, good old Mofati is here." By this time it was already dark, and I could barely see to let him in. As I approached the door, I saw the hulking, dark figure of a man standing in a long, black trench coat holding a gigantic spear in

his hand. I just almost passed out, remembering the prophecy of my dad. Luckily I recognized him before I passed out from my extreme case of fear. I was very happy to see him, so I told him to please come in to visit for a while.

Since we put in a rather full work day that started at the break of dawn and we only had kerosene lamps and couldn't see very well by them, I always turned in quite early. Also, with John being gone, there wasn't much use to stay up. But that night Mofati stayed, and stayed and stayed some more—until 11:00 P.M. because he thought I was lonely, when I merely wanted a means of protection. Since I had a hard time understanding his English, and I didn't know any Chitumbuka at that time, I was quite worn out at the end of his visit. He came the next two nights, and it was a repeat performance of the first. I finally told him that I felt safe now and he wouldn't have to come any more. He was so good and kind. He really felt I was lonely, as well as scared, and he wanted me to feel right at home in the African bush. I marveled at his kindness to me.

Our nightwatchmen

Over the years, we had many different watchmen that John hired to watch the property at night because we did have petty thieves in the area. Being a nightwatchman is not an easy task because so many of them just cannot stay awake in the middle of the night. So John decided that the best way he could tell if they were awake was to have them carry one of the little "nyalis" (hurricane lanterns). As they walked around the yard, he could see the little lamp moving. If it didn't move for a long time, he knew they were sleeping, and he'd get up out of bed and go wake them. We had many come and go over the years. One of them brought his blanket and climbed through the window of the peanut house, rolled up in it and went to sleep. So John decided he was not the best watchman one could have.

He then hired a man people called "Watayi" because he

always wore a coat and tie to work, even while guarding the house and property at night. This name simply meant "Mr. Tie." One night, as it grew quite late, John looked out and watched for a long time, but could not see Watayi's light at all. He got up out of bed and headed down toward the other house where he found our very sleepy watchman deep in slumberland. John just stood there watching him for some time. Watayi woke up and slowly became aware that he was being watched by John. He decided he would pretend that he hadn't been asleep, so he started to pray out loud a long prayer for John Thiesen and his family, thanking God for sending them so far from their home in America to help the African people and asking the Lord to bless our whole family. John was truly baffled and didn't know what to do. How could he fire a praying watchman? Later on John hired two watchmen to be on duty at the same time so they could help each other stay awake. It is very hard in the middle of the night to remain awake when all the rest of the world is sleeping.

Johanna

We had not been in Malawi very long when we met the wife of one of our preachers who lived in the Nkamanga Valley, over near Rumphii. She was a Cape Coloured lady from Pretoria, South Africa, by the name of Johanna. Her aunt had brought her to Malawi where she had met and married her husband, Christone Chisiza. Johanna was very short, slight of frame with high cheekbones and a yellow complexion. She was of those people from Cape Province, South Africa who are descendants of mixed parentage of Dutch and Hottentot, known as "Cape Coloureds."

I was absolutely thrilled to meet a woman who could speak my language so well and had come from a modern environment and could understand what I was talking about. I never realized how starved I was for the sound of the English language from a fellow female, even though we had only been there a few weeks. Everything was such a big change for me. My whole world had changed. Here I was in the middle of the African bush so very

different from my homeland. Over the years, Johanna became my best lady friend in the northern part of the country. She often helped me clean my house, and it actually shone when she was through with it. The cement floors were like glass after she had polished and buffed. We had many cups of tea and biscuits together over the years until she was stricken with liver cancer and passed away in 1979.

Houseboys

We had Welton Jere, another fine person who helped us for many years. He washed our clothes for us until we were forced to return to the States because of John's illness in 1991. We didn't have any way to wash our clothing except by hand. With my teaching the children every day, and all the other activities I was engaged in, there was not much time left for laundry. Ironing the



Welton Jere did our laundry and went to market to buy our meat.

clothes was a major job. Our iron weighed approximately 5 pounds, a big cast iron contraption with a latch on the top so that you could open it up and put coals of fire inside to make it hot. At intervals, it had to be swung through the air to reheat the coals through air holes in the side. It needed a man's muscle to lift the thing for several hours. So Jere did all of this work for us.

One of Jere's jobs was to go to Mhuju each week to buy our beef. He would go down and wait until the cow was killed and inspected by the "doctor" to make sure the meat was not diseased. He would then tell the butcher how many kilograms of meat that we wanted, and the butcher would take a big axe and chop it off. After Jere brought it home, we would wash off the leaves, wood shavings and slivers of bone and cut it into chunks to put in the kerosene fridge. One thing for sure, it was very fresh.

When our menu called for chicken, we bought a rooster from one of the villagers and killed it and ate it that day. We had to have several hours to do this though because those chickens were tough as shoe leather unless cooked for hours. I might add, we inherited many chickens over the years, as John was continually visiting among different congregations all over the country and receiving them as gifts according to the African custom of hospitality toward visitors. However, we were not allowed to eat the chickens because the children named them on sight and confiscated them as pets.

We had a problem keeping meat for very long because of the kerosene fridge. It just would not freeze the way an electric one would. John has literally spent hours gazing down that chimney in the back of that old fridge cleaning it out and working on the burner and wick over and over trying to get the refrigerator to freezing. One memorable day, he was in the kitchen working on it when I heard a loud explosion. I ran in there to find flames shooting out everywhere from under the fridge and John beating the flames out with a tea towel. He escaped with his life, but

what an ugly fridge! The whole bottom half of it was now black. We took paint and made it look a bit better. A few years later, we bought a gas one. So that was the reason we often ate meat fresh off the hoof!

One person we had working in the house for us for many years must also be included as one of our good workers. When I say "good worker," I mean just that, but not that he was always honest. Our whole family loved him and he actually loved us too. He especially thought Kim, our youngest, was special. He said because she was born in Malawi that she had been "born free." That meant she was born under the Malawian Government rule and not under European rule, since Malawi had gained her independence in 1964.

I was very disappointed in him at times. One such time, he came to me and said, "Madam, have you seen my dust cloth?" I looked at his back pocket, and there it was hanging out. I kidded



Rubber is a precious commodity in Malawi.
(Mike and McCloud Chisiza with slingshots.)

him and said, "Are you pinching the dust cloth?" He said, "No, Madam." As he yanked it out of his pocket, several biscuits also came out. I said, "Where did you get the biscuits?" He said, "You served them to me for my teatime this morning, Madam." I said, "No, that was a different kind." I asked, "Why did you do this?" and he said, "I just wanted to give (to) my children—please forgive me." I told him to go on home; I needed time to think this over. I was so disappointed, my heart just ached with



Chicken house is on stilts to keep out varmints.

sorrow because we all liked him so much. But we knew if he would take biscuits, he would take other things. We talked it over and decided we would let him come back because we felt so sorry for him. We had a good talk with him and told him we would give him another chance. So he came back to work, happy as a lark, and so were we because all of us were reconciled.

All went well for a long time, and we were sure he was the most honest person alive—until temptation struck again. That was in the form of “mpira” (rubber) from an inner tube, one of Mark’s prized possessions his dad had given him to use to make slingshots. You need to understand here how valuable an inner tube is to all the Malawians. They use it to tie loads on their bikes. It is used for most anything you can think of. In fact, it worked really well for us missionaries, too. It mended all the leaks in our water hoses, it was the springs for our screen doors and couch cushions and the boys’ mattresses rested on it. We often said that Lubagha Mission was held together with rubber. Mark decided he wanted to share a few inches of it with our good houseboy, and that was a big mistake. Mark told him to cut off a certain number of inches that day, as we were on our way to Blantyre and didn’t have time to do it. Well, he did just that—plus more, leaving only a few inches for Mark and measuring his own, we felt sure, in feet. I decided then and there he could not work for us anymore, as much as we loved him. It was not a good place for him to be.

So we called another meeting to ask him why he had taken the lion’s share of Mark’s rubber. He confessed to wrong-doing again and begged for forgiveness. I said, “No, I will not forgive you this time, and you’re finished here.” John agreed with me, and we decided we just didn’t need that kind of help. Early the next morning, as the beautiful day dawned, I heard an “Odi” and a knock at the door, and there stood a messenger with a letter from our ex-worker begging for forgiveness again. He was threatening to throw himself into the Rukuru river if we didn’t take him back because, he said, “I am loving you too much.” My heart fell; what were we to do? So we called another meeting and asked him why he kept taking things. He said, “Bwana and Madam, I’m very sorry, but you know this place is just like a store in here. There is too much katundu (things), so I am tempted too much.”

But John and I decided again he had to go. This was easier



A python Henry killed while out hunting.

said than done. One of his fellow workers, who was a good friend of his, came to us and said that the Bible taught we were supposed to forgive him even if he re-pented 7 times 70 times. We most certainly didn't want to be con-sidered as cold or harsh, so John came up with the ideal solution. We would put him outside to cut grass on the mission so that he wouldn't be in the house where he could be tempted. He was very happy with that idea, and to this day he has remained a good, faithful worker outside, while our "katundu" has also been spared.



Joseph Nhlephuni, one of our best houseboys.

Communication problems

The Malawians used English in a different way than we were used to, which led to some amusing misunderstandings between us during that period when we were still new to the country. An interesting example of this happened while I was returning to the mission one day. One of our neighbours by the name of Chijere asked if he could ride back to the mission with me. I said, "Sure you can." As we travelled along in the car, he looked over at me and said, "You know, Madam, I have not taken anything all day." I was stunned. He was confessing to me that he had not stolen all day! I thought, "What kind of person is this?" He even preached occasionally. So I just said, "What did you say?" He repeated, "I have not taken anything all day." I thought I needed to say something, so I said, "That's good." He looked at me like I was really crazy and said, "It is not good! I'm too hungry and my

stomach is paining.” Then it dawned on me that he was using the word “take” to mean “eat” and that he was actually complaining of not having had anything to eat all day, rather than talking about stealing. I kept quiet the rest of the way to the mission and was hoping he would too.

Another thing happened to me before I could understand any Chitumbuka at all that is still embarrassing to me to this very day. I went down to the little town of Mhuju three miles away and, while there, a very weary looking lady came up to me and, through sign language and Chitumbuka, begged for a ride. So I said I’d be glad to help her. She climbed in the back of the pick-up, and I headed for home. The lady seemed so happy to have gotten a lift up the road, and I was happy and my heart felt light because I was doing something good for someone. However, she started making motions and hollering as we drove down the road. I looked back at her and smiled largely so she’d know I was very happy to be of help. As we drove on, she kept shouting and trying to tell me something, but I just smiled and went right on. As soon as I reached the mission road to our house, I stopped and let her out so that she could continue on her journey. She said,



Our kids' dog "Jill" with her head stuck in a jug.

“Tawonga chomene,” (Thank you very much). I went on home, feeling I had done my good deed for the day. I never knew any difference until several years later when she came up to John and told him how I had given her a ride in the opposite direction she was wanting to go, and that she had laughed and told many people the story. So I had added three more miles to her journey!

We usually picked up people on the road and carried them several miles to their destinations. They were always so thankful and usually would say, “God bless you.” One lady just shouted, “Thank you, Church of Christ!” It seemed there were so many ways of letting our light shine in that beautiful country that became our lovely home. We constantly had to remind ourselves of the Scripture in 2 Thessalonians 3:13 not to grow “weary in well doing.” There was so much good that needed to be done and not nearly enough time to get it all done. Besides, the body was sometimes weary, even when the spirit was willing.

Mosquito nets

One thing that I was not particularly fond of was using mosquito nets. Missionaries who had lived in Malawi for years told us that we should use them, as mosquitoes are always in abundance at night and bite more at that time. We felt sure they knew best, so we purchased nets for each member of the family. I found it very difficult to tuck them in all the way around, especially in trying to keep them from sagging down in your face. They often ripped if you pulled them too tight. I often felt that my oxygen supply was being cut off. I told John, “Let’s just keep them on the kids, but I don’t want those things in my face.” He agreed he did not like them either, saying that the air didn’t seem to get through, so we happily removed the smothering things from our bed.

Not long after that, while deep in slumberland, something landed right on my face, extremely cold and clammy. Also a mite rubbery. I was so scared! I threw it from my face, and it

slammed up against the far wall. I knew it must be a huge python or mamba. John grabbed the torch and shined it right in the bulbous eyes of a big toad. He just looked back at us innocently, as though he couldn't seem to understand why he was not welcome in our bed.

We had lived there long enough and had had enough snakes in the living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom and breezeway that we became paranoid about them. So one night, again as I was in a deep sleep, I was rudely awakened as John grabbed me and threw me completely out of the bed onto the floor. I started screaming, "What's the matter? What's the matter?" I thought he was becoming abusive or had lost his mind. He said, "There's a snake in this bed!" He took the torch (flashlight) and, after much searching, discovered that the elastic in the corner of the fitted sheet had come loose and popped up onto the bed. I was fortunate I came out of that without a bruise or broken bone. Later, we decided to put the net back on.

My first trip to the village

The first preaching trip that I accompanied John on was a trip to Kazuni. Usually I stayed at the mission with the kids while John was out, but on this particular trip John decided it would be good for me to go as it wasn't nearly so far as most of his trips. This would give me a chance to meet some of the Christians in the area, because I got very lonely at the mission when John was gone so much.

We packed food, water, and other supplies for our trip and headed down the rough road for Kazuni. It seemed we went so far down a little bumpy trail that I thought we'd never find our way out of there again. The trail finally ended and we stopped, as we could go no farther. It seemed there couldn't possibly be people living anywhere near, because there seemed to be only bush and more bush, but as soon as John turned off the ignition and the noise of the motor died away people started materializing



Cooking supper Malawi style.

from everywhere. They surrounded our Landrover and pressed their curious faces against the windows. There was not even an inch of window that was not covered over by a staring face, looking especially at me and the children. Many of them had never seen a white woman or child before. They unashamedly tried to touch our hair and get as close to us as possible. I was so afraid, because I'd never experienced anything like this before. Were they going to hurt us? Was this normal? What should we do? We couldn't turn around—there was no place to go. As they looked at us, I could see that they were discussing us openly, even though I didn't know a word they were saying. Then I began to see that these were just very curious people. There was no need for me to be afraid. Then, all of a sudden, a tall, slim young man came forward and shouted in some very welcome English, "Black people, go home!" And they all started to scatter and leave us alone.

That night was a very memorable night as brethren in the area came from villages far and near and we all gathered around a picturesque campfire in the black African night, sang the beautiful spiritual songs in the Chitumbuka language and heard very moving lessons from God's word. It was a night I shall never forget. What started out as scary and frightening for me turned into a most inspirational evening.

The longer we stayed there in that beautiful, friendly, hospitable land, the more contented we became. Life was good, our family was happy. The Lord's church was growing. People were being taught and converted. We were all happy in our new and different way of life.

Regarding the receptivity to the gospel of these wonderful



Ladies carrying grass for their roofs.

Malawian people, John wrote the following to our supporting congregations at the end of that first year:

“At the completion of one year in Malawi, we have seen 30 new churches established in the North. These are found in four of the five districts. Also there have been 664 baptized into Christ. The total number of active churches as of this date are 74. Total number of tracts distributed among these four northern Districts last year: 100,000.

“One of the main causes of good growth in this work is the rapid development of preachers in the local congregation. These people are eager to learn. Both before and after conversion, they are seen with their noses buried in the New Testament. As a result, they quickly increase in the knowledge of God’s word. You seldom find a person who cannot find a verse of Scripture quickly anywhere in the Bible. In a surprisingly short time you see recent converts preaching the Bible to others. Their ambition to increase in learning quickly, coupled with a natural aptitude for public speaking, turns many of them into carriers of the gospel.

“On a recent visit to one church I saw a man preaching who could not even read or write. He called out for the Scriptures to be read by others, and then he fired away preaching. In the same congregation that morning a young man preached who had only been converted to Christ the week before! With this spirit, the gospel can be carried to every creature.

“I received the thrilling news from brother Judd that support has been promised for other preachers to work full time here in the North. Since there are many areas where we do not have a preacher working, this opens up grand prospects for the spread of the gospel. After careful thought, we asked four men to devote their full time to preaching. With these men spread out in a thin line across the vast Mzimba District, an area just barely touched heretofore, we are praying that this year will be one of even greater growth than last year.”

I Become A "Doctor"

During the time I was teaching the children we would have many Africans come to the door needing medicine for malaria, colds, wounds, etc. I often wished they wouldn't come until I was finished, but it didn't often happen that way. Frequently a lady on her way to the maternity clinic at Mhuju would collapse on a path in the bush in heavy labour and couldn't walk another step. I stopped everything and the men would carry her and put her in the car, groaning and moaning, holding her knees together to try to prevent the baby from coming out in my car. I would rush to the Mhuju clinic while she cried out at every bump in the road. I thought, "Which is better: drive fast over the bumps, or drive slowly and learn how to deliver a baby in the back seat of my car?"

One night, I remember in particular, we heard the low murmur of voices out under the big old tree in our yard close to our bedroom window. I just got a bellyache, and so did John, because it was 1:00 A.M. and we knew it meant a trip to the Rumphu hospital 17 miles away over a washboard road. Oh, were we sleepy and tired! We thought that if we remained very quiet, maybe those voices would go away, but they didn't. John was extremely tired—he had worked so hard that day teaching and preaching. I said, "I'll go this time."

Sure enough, the people out under the tree in the wee hours of the morning were desperate for help. They carried a letter from the H.A. (Hospital Attendant) at Mhuju dispensary saying they had a lady trying to deliver twins feet first and that she needed "transport" (transportation) to the Rumphu hospital. Could we please help? So we cheerfully agreed, in front of them, while crying inwardly. How we did dread that trip! But we knew what the Lord would want us to do. I truly knew then what that

Scripture meant: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." My flesh was extremely weak that night. I went out and started up that big old monstrosity of a Landrover and headed down the dark, bumpy road to Mhaju to pick up the poor, suffering woman to carry her to Rumphii. She was in terrible pain trying to deliver but couldn't. I also picked up the midwife, and we drove as fast as the road would allow. We couldn't make very good time because we had to keep stopping to check the lady in the back of the Landrover. The midwife kept pushing little feet back in while I held the torch (flashlight) so that she could see. My heart ached for that poor woman and for the hard time that all of them have because of their great lack of necessities. Nevertheless, we drove on and, after an hour, we were at the hospital. I thought those twins would never be alive by the time they were delivered. But God surely took care of them, because the next day some people brought us the report that they were delivered safe and sound.

Carrying the dead

We had so many such trips over the years that I can't begin to remember all of them, but I think the saddest of all the things that happened were the many deaths that continually took place. Some people came and said a baby had died some miles away. Would I please come and get the body and bring it to the burial ground? There wasn't any hearse around; we were it. School was dismissed for the day and I went to get the body. I'll never forget how sad it was. The parents of the baby had put its little body in an old, battered, brown suitcase. This was its coffin. As I drove down the road, my heart was so heavy I could hardly see to drive. They had no way to take this baby to its burial ground except by us. God had given us this car so that we could help them. I was truly thankful we could help and my flesh was stronger that day. As we drove down the road, the mother was wailing, "Mwana wane, Mwana wane" (my child, my child).

Another time that was hard for me was when a man came and asked me if I would carry his wife's body to her home village for

burial. At this time we had a little yellow Datsun sedan with seats that reclined. I really had my doubts that we could get a body in that car, especially if she had been dead for a while. Sure enough, when I reached the place and tried to put her body in the car, it was already stiff. I let the front seat down, but they had a terrible time getting her in there right next to me. They had her wrapped in an old gray blanket. I just about came unglued! I asked myself, "Is this Columbia Ann Swanigan who grew up in the Ozark mountains of Missouri? What am I doing here?" But I knew deep down this was where God wanted me. This was my land now, and I was here to serve in any way, no matter what. The husband of the deceased woman climbed into the back seat and tried to keep the body from falling over on me as I drove. However, it did fall on my shoulder several times. This was very hard on me, but I also grieved for that man in the back seat. I thought to myself, "I wish every American could see things like this." I learned how blessed we really are in the United States. After I reached the house again I went in and told the kids all about it. John was gone on a preaching trip at the time. I relived that day all night long.

One very sad time that was so heart-rending occurred years later, during the hot, dry season in 1990. Some people came saying they desperately needed us to go to the lakeshore with our car to get the body of a young Christian woman. She had gone there for a visit, had become sick and died while there. They just begged us to bring her home for burial. John was teaching in the Bible schools and couldn't go, so he asked me to take Passwell Msowoya to help me find the village where the body was. So Kim, Passwell and I headed to the lakeshore straight away.

We went to the village where we were supposed to find her, but no one knew of a death. But we knew, if we kept asking at different villages, we would surely find the right place, and we finally did. As we approached the village, we saw many people sitting around weeping. As Passwell got out of the pickup, he

told me and Kimberly to wait until he could make arrangements for us to carry the body. But as he talked to the elders of the village, they told him that the body had burst and could not be taken. They would bury her there as fast as they could. When he told me, my heart ached and I felt so terribly sorry for the loved ones of this lady. How tragic not to be able even to bring the body back home for burial. I wept inside for these people. I was so thankful for all with which Americans have been blessed, and I thought of how great our homeland was and how much I had to be thankful for. Here there was not even a way to embalm a body.

Treating the sick

We were really settled in and beginning to feel like Malawians. We were so busy day after day that we rose early each morning so we could get everything done that needed to be done in a single day. I would hurriedly get breakfast, and we would try to eat before a Malawian came to the door needing something. We seldom got through a meal without someone needing help. Much of the time it would be a sick person with malaria needing munkwara (medicine). We bought malaria pills and aspirin by the thousands. Many times, it would be little children with deep, tropical ulcers hollowed out clear to the bone on their ankles and covered with flies. I treated them with medicines and plasters (band aids) and told them to please keep the sores covered and the flies off. Those sores were almost impossible to heal.

Many came with chikoso (colds). I usually just gave them aspirin and cough syrup if they were coughing. At first, I would give them a whole bottle of cough syrup to take home with them, but I had to stop that because they loved the taste and kept coming back for more. One lady, Mrs. Chiunga, started coming with a really bad case of diarrhea, and I gave her a drug called Lomatil for it. Almost every patient I had given it to was okay in a day or two at most, but this woman was coming every day, even

though I was sending pills home with her. Then I found that this kind of medicine was addictive, so the poor lady had to overcome her drug habit in a hurry because I stopped giving them to her.

We found out that many of the Malawians felt that, if a little munkwara will make you feel better, then a lot of it will make you feel great. One such incident which just about killed one of the Christians at Buwira happened while John was in an Ungano (Gospel Meeting). One sister in the church had a terrible headache and, seeing one of her fellow Christians “drinking” pills, as they say, begged her to share some of her pills. The lady told her, “These are my heart pills, but you can have some. They may help you. So the sick woman took them, but they didn’t help her. So, while the other’s back was turned, she snatched the bottle and swallowed every pill in it! After a while she passed out under a big tree and John had to rush her to the Rumphu hospital to have her stomach pumped. So, we started just giving the initial dose at the mission and telling them to come back when the next dose was due, unless we knew the person well. We also found that many times they would sell the extra medicine we sent home with them. We really felt badly making them come back to the mission for their meds because they all had to walk while they were sick, but we did not know any other way to handle the situation. This was also the way they did it at the dispensary.

I develop “germ phobia”

We saw many sad things over the years that frightened me especially. Although I felt that John and I could take care of ourselves, I was afraid for our children. I developed a sort of germ phobia. I was terrified of germs, which were rampant in the tropical climate. One time our family drove down to beautiful Nkhata Bay to swim in the clear blue Lake Malawi. I can’t describe the loveliness of that place. It just took our breath away as we descended the gloriously green mountains to the shores of that sparkling gem of a lake, the 12th largest in the world.

We had decided to have a picnic that day and get away from our labours at the mission. I will never forget the horror and shock I felt, after reaching the beach, upon looking into the face of a man who came up to us pleading for help. He was so disfigured with leprosy that it was unreal. His feet were toeless stubs, and his fingers were completely gone. He had white patches all over him where the leprosy had eaten away his body. He asked John, "Can your wife come and cook for me?" It scared me so much I nearly screamed. I knew he must have people looking at him with horrified faces all the time. John hurriedly gave him twenty pounds and told him to buy some food. My children were so good that day. They never let on in his presence that they had seen anything different or unusual about the man. Some of the beauty of that day went behind a cloud when I saw that poor disfigured man. He was only the first of many lepers that we would see over the years in that far-away land. Some of them we would find in the Lord's church.

Sometimes these things caused problems in the church there. The church at Bwengu had a leper in it who always liked to sit on the front row. The problem was in the taking of the Lord's Supper. Many Christians did not want to take communion after him. But as the years went by, we saw fewer and fewer lepers because they had found effective medicines for leprosy. We would often see "Lepra" trucks in the villages treating leprosy patients. After six months, they could be completely cured if they took the full course. One man who works on the mission was completely cured and did not have any disfigurement because he started treatment in time.

Nevertheless, I was still so afraid of leprosy that I didn't want to be remotely connected with anyone who I suspected might have it. Their custom in the north was to always shake your hand upon meeting, even a dozen times a day if you met that often. And, of course, with all the mission workers we had, we saw one another several times every day. When they had colds or other

diseases, I always felt better if we didn't shake hands quite so much. I remember during a cholera scare one year many died of this horrible disease. It produces violent diarrhea and vomiting that can completely dehydrate the body in a few hours. We carried one woman with this disease in the back of our pick-up to the dispensary who died a few hours later.

I mostly worried about my children. They played all the time with other children, and I was afraid they would forget and eat something without washing their hands. At the house I fixed a pan of bleach water daily, and, after we had all washed, we dipped our hands in this solution as extra precaution. I don't want to forget to say that I also prayed daily for the safety of our family. God surely looked after us because we were seldom sick, except for malaria from time to time.

Down with malaria

The first time we were stricken with this devastating disease, I thought surely we would die. At the time, I didn't much care if I did die. John and I both got sick the same day. We took to our bed, shivering and shaking and we couldn't pile on enough blankets to keep warm. We finally got up enough energy to drive the three miles to Mhuju to the local dispensary. The H.A. said, "You have the flu," and gave us an injection of penicilin. He told us to come back for three days more of injections. We still did not improve and by this time we were both living in a dreamland and partly delirious. Sunday came and we couldn't go for worship, so the Christians brought us Communion, which I couldn't take because I was so sick. The next day Kemelton Harawa came and drove us to Ekwendeni hospital 45 miles away (John had been teaching him how to drive). We were too weak to drive ourselves, and here we were so very far away from a hospital. Oh, how I yearned for my mama and for her to take care of me once again and make me feel better, as she did when I was young. But I was too far away and too sick even to write and tell her.

After we got to the hospital, Dr. Kenneth Irving, a white doctor from Kenya, told us we had a bad case of malaria. He treated us with Chloroquine and told us to rest at his house for the day before we started back to the mission. The four kids, Kemelton, John and I spent the day there while John and I rested and slept, giving the drugs time to start killing the parasites in our weak bodies. The Irvings gave us hot tea and bread to eat throughout the day. We couldn't stand the thought of any other food.

As the sun began to sink low in the west, we headed back for our bush home. We felt that we had survived and were going to make it after all. We felt drained for a full week, and then our strength returned with its full force. John went back to preaching, and I went back to teaching my precious children—not that they minded being out of school! By this time we had a routine worked out, and the children were very good about doing their daily studies. It was just the monotony of doing it every day when I'd rather do something else that wore on me. But we kept plodding along trying to keep up with children back in the States.

At the beginning of 1970 as we began our second year in Malawi, John was concentrating on planting the church in new areas where the gospel had not yet been preached. This had already started the previous year, but the strategy now was to put full-time preachers in the places where the new converts needed grounding in the faith. In his January 1970 newsletter to our supporters in the States, he wrote:

“With the arrival of the new year, I would like to give you a picture of the hopes we have for the Malawi work in 1970. The year 1969 saw the church pushing into many new areas in the North. We now have congregations up in the Karonga District which were not in existence at the beginning of last year. And now we have some good news. Brother Passwell Msowoya, who for the past several years has been preaching in Tanzania, has returned from that country to his native Malawi. After arriving at his home village near us, Passwell decided to move his family

to Karonga in order to work in that virgin field for the gospel. He has found a house centrally located in town handy for peddling his bicycle out to the many villages.

“One of the things which impressed me most about brother Msowoya’s decision to move to Karonga is the prevalence of mosquitos and malaria in that area. Two members of my family, myself, and two preachers have all caught malaria on past trips to the place. Leaving the Henga Valley and moving his family into an unhealthy area speaks highly for Passwell’s love for souls. I’m glad we have such a man of God.

“As we enter the new year, our eyes are turning toward the North’s biggest District, the Mzimba District. Down among the Ngoni people lies one of the most fertile places I know for the gospel of Christ. We seldom visit the villages. Although it is a vast area with the heaviest population in the North, we have only been able barely to touch its possibilities. Now, we are hoping to do more preaching in the Mzimba District. Support for four preachers has been promised as we arrive at the foot of 1970—a wonderful way to begin a new year! Two preachers, as a result, are now being put to work in new areas of that giant District.

“Flasswell Nyirongo, who has long proved himself a tireless worker for Christ, is one of them. For a long time, Flasswell has walked miles across the bush, preaching wherever he had opportunity. This year he started two new congregations, as well as preaching at his own home congregation at Euthini. He has virtually dedicated full time to the work, turning over his garden to his brother. As a result, he was plunged into deep poverty. Nevertheless he cheerfully counted all things loss for Christ. He could not stand by and tend his garden while others perished. Now it is good to see Flasswell relieved of financial pressures while he continues to devote his time to saving the lost.

“The other brother who will shortly be devoting full-time to the battle is one of our grasscutters, Watson Ndhlovu. Watson is a very zealous preacher. He hacks away all week at the relentless

growth pressing in on all sides at the mission property, and then on Lord's Day you can see him heading quickly down the path toward Jere Kere, five miles north of Lubagha. About six months ago, Jere Kere was in need of a man to preach. The church consisted mostly of women, and the only man able to preach had moved away to look for work. Watson was asked if he would help, and he readily jumped into the work with all he had in him. As a result, Jere Kere has become one of the fastest growing churches in the North. Every week, practically without fail, Watson has been baptizing people. Besides preaching at the worship services on Sunday morning, he goes out the same afternoon and teaches house to house in the villages. On one particular farm he has baptized almost all the help. We have talked with Watson, and he has agreed to move to the Mzimba District. Here is a central location from which he can go out and visit the numerous villages scattered to 15 miles east and to 40 miles across the mountains."

The Growing Up Years

*D*uring their growing up years in Africa, Henry and Michael led a Huckleberry Finn life along the Rukuru River which passed through Lubagha Mission. Robin always tried to tag along whenever they would let her. Most boys don't want a young sister trailing along, and they were no exception. As a result she was often left behind. Our boys did many things they should not have done that were on the dangerous side, some of which we found out only years later after they had grown up.

Our boys tree a leopard

One hair-raising experience they had that aged me at least ten



Mike and Henry, alias "Huck" and "Tom".

years happened when they treed a baby leopard while its mama was near by. The two of them and some African friends were hunting with their pellet guns when they saw a baby "wild cat". They decided they would shoot it. The poor

little cat leaped from the tree and ran for all it was worth, with two young white boys, some young black boys, and several dogs in hot pursuit. That cat knew just where it was going—straight home to its mama under a clump of bushes. So when Henry and Mike and the other boys reached the bushes, there was a full-sized mama leopard hissing and spewing and determined to protect her baby. It didn't take long for all of those boys to make tracks in a hurry back to the mission. Only the dogs stayed behind, yapping and barking and keeping the mother leopard at bay until the boys all got away. Truly our boys' guardian angel was looking after them that day as they were spared. We had many such incidents over the years that gave me many frights. I know mothers and fathers have many frightful events happen while rearing their children. Ours just happened to be a bit different.

One day after school the boys had gone out hunting as usual for the afternoon. They came in very excited because a government hunter had just killed a hippopotamus that had been destroying the villagers' gardens. They said they wanted to go and see. It was up the river a ways. They headed off, with a lot of the Africans, to get some of the hippo meat for their families to eat. Henry and Mike took "dental" equipment for working on the hippo's teeth to extract them for souvenirs to take back to the States some day. They did a super job and came home with some king size hippo teeth. They boiled them in water on the stove in order to remove any remaining meat or attached nerves. And then they brushed them and shined them up. Years later, they carried them in their cars hanging down from the rear-view mirrors. They made fine conversation pieces.

Mofati, our foreman, had quite an experience with a hippo one day. He was doing his best to drive it out of his garden but the hippo had no intention of leaving those good tasting veggies, so he chased Mofati all the way back to his house. Mofati ran as fast as he could, fleeing into his house and shutting the door

behind. The hippo stood outside the door for a while, then turned and went back to his happy eating of Mofati's garden. Mofati left him alone for the time being.

Our boys were good boys, but they weren't careful boys. I always warned them to be very careful day after day as they went to the bush or to the river. I prayed every day that God would take care of them, because I knew I couldn't. One day they were down on the river goofing off when they spied a large Kababa (Monitor Lizard) and decided they would get the best of it. But they almost didn't. They were fighting it with a spear when it



opened its jaws and sank its sharp teeth into one of Henry's shoes. Henry was doing everything to make it let go. It chomped down all the more while Henry was trying to spear it. He finally did manage to kill it with the spear. It was the size of a three or four foot crocodile and looked a lot like one. Maybe that part of the world is not the place to raise your children if you're faint-hearted or have boys who want to live like Huck Finn.

Henry was chased by a black mamba.

Henry races a snake

One day, as our older son Henry went out hunting, he came back with a snake story that still scares me to tell. He had gone a long way from the house with his friend when they came upon two snakes resting under a tree. Suddenly, one rose up, charged at Henry, and started chasing him. He did not have time to aim and shoot, but just threw his gun down and ran as fast as he could. It was a black mamba that stood on its tail as it chased him.



Michael preparing ground for his popcorn garden.

Henry said later that it looked like a piece of rope dangling in the air behind him as he ran. It chased him until he came to a ravine, which Henry leaped. Landing hard on his hands and knees on the far side of the ravine, Henry was all out of breath and he could run no farther. Looking back, he saw the snake skid to a stop at the edge of the ravine and

then turn and slither rapidly back to the tree where the chase had begun.

On another occasion, Henry and Michael had finished their school work for the day and decided it was time to head for the bush again to see what kind of meat they could bring in for the family. They hunted until their weary little bodies needed a rest. After finding a good spot under a tree and sitting down, Mike leaned back on one hand, which came to rest on something soft and spongy. Puzzled, he began giving it a few exploratory strokes, when it suddenly came to him that something was wrong here! When he looked down, it was into the cold, black eyes of a poisonous puff adder upon which his full weight was leaning. He jumped several feet into the air, screaming like a hysterical woman, and the boys left that place in a hurry.

Hyenas

Another animal that was very plentiful in Malawi was the hyena. We heard them often at night and I was terrified of them also. We had heard about small children being taken right off their khondes or porches at night and carried to the hyenas' den. So I did not like them around our house.

One night, while John was away and the kids and I were there alone, I was sitting with my feet hanging out the back door. It was dark, and I was just sitting there resting trying to cool off as it was quite warm. Suddenly, the dogs ran over to me, as close as they could get, staying as quiet as church mice. I didn't know what was going on until Henry hurried over and said, "Mom, there's a hyena in the yard. You better close the door." I almost died of fright! I slammed the door so hard it almost came off its hinges! I certainly wasn't any good with a gun, and I didn't know if the hyena would try to get in the house or not. I couldn't believe what it did. It came right around to the living room window, put its face up to the glass and looked in. And then decided we weren't very interesting and went on its way. I found my



Hyenas often visited our house at night.

first gray hair the next morning!

But God truly was good to us. He kept right on taking care of us day after day. He kept us very happy, too, with what we had. Our children were such a great blessing to us, and we were a very close family. We knew we had a different way of life from other people in the States, but we felt it couldn't be better. We knew material things aren't what make you happy. We wouldn't have traded places with anyone. Our kids still feel that they had the best childhood possible.

Learning the language

Our daughter, Robin Ann, made many good friends among the African children over the years, so she was never lonely for playmates. Her best friend was a little girl named Hannah Harawa, the daughter of John's secretary, Kemelton Harawa. She would come down to the mission, and they would play together



Robin Ann, our little Chitumbuka-speaking chatterbox and her friends,
with Henry.

the whole day. Robin always had a whole troop of little African girls tagging along behind her. They played the games the children in the village played. We often wondered how she could play so well with them when they only spoke Chitumbuka. Then, one day when John was working in his little thatched office behind our kitchen, he heard outside his door a little girl speaking up a storm in Chitumbuka, chattering away to her friends. Wondering who the chatterbox was, he got up and went to the door to look out. There sat Robin among her friends, speaking and sounding just like a true Tumbuka girl. We were very pleased that she, as well as the boys, could speak that beautiful African tongue. We knew then that our children had become true Malawians and would fit in well with the local children. We were also pleased and thankful that they wanted to share everything they had with their friends.

Bee attack

One Sunday morning, at the close of worship services while the invitation song was being sung, we had four to respond wanting to be baptized into Christ. Everyone was excited; this truly was a wonderful conclusion to our worship services. We all filed out the back door and headed down the footpath to the Rukuru River to witness the grand occasion. The singing on the way to the baptismal hole was absolutely beautiful, bringing tears to my eyes. I knew God must truly be pleased as well as praised and that angels in Heaven were rejoicing.

As we all gathered around the river bank to witness this grand event, some African ladies behind me and Kim shouted, "Njuchi! Njuchi!" (Bees! Bees!) and pointed above my head. I looked up into the low hanging limbs above my head, and there were bees, bees and more bees swarming out of a log bee box that my two sons, Henry and Michael, had hung from the tree to entice bees to make honey in. The bees had already started land-



Thousands are baptized into Christ yearly in Malawi.

ing in my hair. Kim and I began running, as well as all the ladies around me, slapping at bees as we ran. People were so terrified they were screaming and fleeing in all directions. Everyone outran me, including Kim, so I was stung in two places. After three days, my face took on the appearance of a very square picture frame. At least that's what my husband told me.

The bees also attacked the ones who were being baptized who were already out in the water, so they ran away too, along with the preachers who were baptizing them. Many of the African men said that Satan had entered the baptism and tried to stop it. Nevertheless, it had a very good ending. The candidates were rounded up again and we completed the baptizing.

One thing I might add about the baptisms we had: there would always be a lesson taught to the candidates while they were standing by the water just before they were baptized. They were taught what their baptism was for before they confessed their faith in Christ and went down into the water. Also, while out in the water with the person being baptized, the preacher would always pause before immersing him and pray that he would be kept safe while under the water from crocodiles, hippos, or whatever other monster was peculiar to that certain river or pond. I often thought that it might possibly take a stronger faith to be baptized in a crocodile-infested stream in Africa than it would in our electrically-heated baptistries in the states. After the baptism was completed, while standing dripping wet on the bank, the new babes in Christ would receive another lesson of exhortation to live a faithful Christian life. A baptismal service in this way could easily last a whole hour. By the time all this was accomplished, they definitely knew what they were doing and what was expected out of them in their new life in Christ.

The ant wars

During the years we spent in Africa we had a terrible problem with ants. All types and sizes seemed to love our house and

wanted to live with us in the kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms. One night John got up to check on our kids to make sure there were no ants on their beds. We had heard that one type of ant common in our area could even kill an elephant if it crawled back into its ear. We had already experienced how painful they are. They don't bite immediately but first climb up high on some tender part of your body, such as the inside of your thigh or around your waist, and then take a big, juicy bite (at least it felt big because it was so painful). Sure enough, as he entered Mark and Robin's bedrooms, he saw literally thousands of ants covering each bed. But fortunately they hadn't got on either of the kids. Their guardian angel was at work again.

We took both children to our room and then declared war with brooms on those mean little ants. We almost never got them out of there. They kept getting on us and biting. They seemed to have suction cup lips. We literally had to pull them off of us. They loved the taste of our skin. I figured they hadn't eaten all day long. After an hour and a half of battle, we got them out. Then we took kerosene and sprinkled it all around the outside of the house's foundation so they wouldn't come back in. They hated the smell of kerosene. This happened to us so many times that I got tired of rising in the middle of the night to kill ants, but we were afraid for our children. Those little critters always slipped in so silently during the dead of the night that we never knew when they were coming for a visit and a meal.

One day someone told me to sprinkle some Ajax all around the house and it would drive them away. So I decided anything was worth a try. I did just that and, as I finished, up walked Mofati. He said, "Madam, what are you doing?" I told him in some detail that those ants were driving me crazy and that I would try anything if it would work. I asked him, "Why do you suppose it works?" So he gave me a detailed description, explaining that, as the ants came and saw the white powder all around, they said to each other, "Hmm, something strange here.

Not to be here before! Best for me to go back!” So they all got in a line and left. It sounded like a good explanation to me. But we still laugh about the way Mofati explained it to me in his broken English, putting words into the ants’ mouths like that. It did work though, the only problem being during rains when the Ajax was washed away, and that was usually the worst time for ants.

Mishaps

One of those rare days when Henry and Michael let Robin trail after them into the bush was almost the undoing of my whole nervous system.

I was in my little kitchen preparing lunch when I heard screaming coming from far across the spacious yard. I ran out to see Mofati hurrying towards me with Robin in his arms and blood streaming down her face. How I had the strength to run to them I don’t know, but I did. I grabbed Robin and told her she was going to be fine, but I just knew she had lost an eye or maybe both. I ran into the house as fast as I could with my heart pounding what felt like 500 beats a minute. I started washing off her face and saw it was not nearly as bad as it seemed at first. It was a cut on her forehead, caused by the axe that Henry had thrown up into a tree in order to knock down some fruit. The handle had hit her and not the blade. That day, I aged another 10 years. It always scared me so much because we were very far away from the doctor. But we survived that and many other emergencies over the years. Somehow, the kids got to keep all their limbs, fingers, and toes. I doubted often that they would.

One time Henry came home with a gaping hole in his leg, caused by his falling on a sharp stump out in the bush. It took a long time to heal, but eventually it did. To this day he has a big, shiny scar right under his knee as a memorial to that event. Despite all their falls and bruises, the children loved Africa, and they felt there was no better place to grow up.

The "Bigfoot" scare

Our two older boys, Henry and Michael, who should have been named Huck and Tom, were always in some type of mischief they should not have been into. One such time was when they made the big tracks out in the garden. They decided to liven up the mission by putting a little fear into everyone. They succeeded very well. Taking some boards, they sawed out two shapes of feet almost a foot and a half long, with four toes on each foot. Then they put on rubber straps in order to bind them to their own feet as they walked. They thought of what fun it was going to be to make big tracks out in the garden where Mofati and his crew came to work every day. Sure enough, the next day as Mofati and the workers came to work, they discovered the tracks and were all discussing excitedly how a "Big Foot" had visited Lubagha Mission the previous night. Mofati said he knew that it was a large animal that lived up in the mountains. Others believed witchcraft was being done. I was absolutely terrified, and the African women were afraid to go to the forest to get firewood. The news spread throughout the Henga Valley while Henry and Michael were silently laughing up their sleeves.

One evening John told me, "Someone is trying to cause trouble on the mission. If this continues, I will have to go to the police to report this matter." Michael overheard this and went to discuss the situation with his partner-in-crime. They decided it was best to confess all to their dad and me. So that evening, as the night grew quiet and we were all tucked in our beds for a good night's rest, we heard a very timid knock at our bedroom door. Henry and Mike entered saying, "Dad, we need to talk to you. We were the ones who made the tracks, just to have some fun." I could not believe they did it, but they took us and showed us the evidence, the big feet they had made that were quite ingenious.

The next day, John called Mofati and the workers together, along with Henry and Mike, and showed them the big feet. We

had some pretty upset workers. They said that Henry and Mike could be in serious trouble with the boma (the government). Mofati was especially upset because he had been so sure and vocal that it was “Big Foot” that had come down from the mountains. The boys apologized to Mofati and the workers. We told them never to do anything like that again, even though John and I did think it was a pretty good joke, but it had just been done in the wrong country.

Mark’s role models

Mark was still very young, but he really began to wonder why there weren’t very many white people in the world. One day he came to me and said, “Mom, why has God made so many black people and not hardly any white?” I explained to him that there were many white people in other places like Europe and the U.S.A. For some time he thought that his grandparents, aunts and uncles were black, but that they could speak English as we did. I never dreamed that he thought that until he told me years



The Rukuru River where our children often played.

later.

I never really realized the kind of influence the African Christians had on my children, especially Mark. Since he had been there most all of his young life from the age of six months, he was watching the men during the worship services all the time. He admired how they preached, how they led songs and prayed. He began carrying his Chitumbuka hymn book with him around the house daily, practicing leading the songs. He sounded just like one of the Malawian song leaders. We really enjoyed watching him do those things.

But one day he carried it a little too far. He had earlier begged his daddy for a Chitumbuka Bible. He took it to church with him each week and looked up all the Scriptures. We were so proud of him. But then he decided his Bible did not look old like the Bibles the African preachers were using, because theirs were dirty and moisture-warped from the rough conditions in the village, so he took it and dipped it in water. He gave it a good, thorough soaking, then let it dry out so that it would look just like theirs. After that, he carried a dog-eared Bible with wavy, swollen pages. But he had accomplished his goal: he was just like the preachers were in all respects now.

Our children had strict orders that they were not to touch the water in the Rukuru River that ran through the mission because I was afraid they would contract Bilharzia, a disease in which the parasite attaches itself to your bladder or intestine. I was also afraid of the river because of the crocodiles and hippopotamuses in it. The boys assured me they only wanted to get in our old boat and row to the other side to go hunting. I agreed to let them. I found out much, much later that they were in the water all the time. Even Robin took her turn wading the river. I believe God was taking care of our children when they were out of our sight.

Living together in Africa so far away from the rest of our relatives had made our family grow incredibly close, and I was thankful to God for that. He had blessed our family in many

ways, the number one being to this day the closeness we have. I feel the Bible readings and devotions that we had each night in our humble living room helped not only our spiritual life then but also cemented the loving relationship we have to this day.

We gain new friends

We also cultivated very close friendships with our African brethren, and most especially with Kemelton and Ruth Harawa. They were always there to help us in any way possible. Kemelton became John's secretary in 1970 and continued as such for 21 years until we had to return home because of John's illness in 1991. He could do anything in the office that John needed him to do. In the earlier years, he traveled with us throughout the country. He taught us how to count the local money, helping us to get back the right change until we had learned the pounds and shillings. In any kind of problem that came up, he was always there to help.



Kemelton Harawa, John's secretary, often had us over for some "delicious."

One of the highlights of our fun times was when Kemelton and Ruth would have our whole family over for sima and chicken. Each of us was seated formally with a coke placed in front of him. From a large bowl, each of us took out a big patty of sima (boiled corn flour), weighing at least one and a half pounds each and put it on our plate. We then used our right hand to pull some of the sima from our patty, rolled it into a ball, and dipped it into the chicken and gravy. Ruth was the best cook in the whole Henga Valley, we thought. My, how we loved those times!

Since we always told Ruth that her sima and chicken were "delicious," Kemelton got to using that as the code word for having us over to eat chicken. He would tell little Mark, "We want you to come over for some 'delicious' tonight," and Mark would smile in happy anticipation. Then we would all look forward to a very special visit with the Harawa family and some good-tasting sima with delicious chicken. We learned from those good times that only our skin color and cultural backgrounds were different, but we were all very much a part of God's family, having the same desire to see people saved. I can truly say that they were, and still are, some of the closest friends we have ever had.

Pets

Over the years the children had many opportunities of keeping exotic type pets, excluding of course the flea-bitten chickens that had been confiscated by their hands before they reached our dinner table.

Two of their most beautiful and unusual pets were the crested cranes. They seemed to strut as they walked in a very proud sort of way. They acted as if they owned the mission and, if we walked outside the door suddenly, they spread their big wings and seemed to say, "We are in charge here." They wore a fine crown on top of their heads, looking as though they had just come from the beauty parlour. They stayed around our house acting as though they were part of our family, which in a sense they were,

because we loved having them. They came there without an invitation, adopting us. Then, sadly, one day one disappeared and only one remained.

Not only the beautiful crested cranes blessed our home, but also a fun-loving monkey that the boys named "Festus". A Malawian came to the door one day with this very cute baby monkey that was needing a home. Our children were so excited to have him. They played with him continually. One of Festus' favourite things to do was to attack Mike. Henry had trained him like a dog to chase Mike. All Henry had to do was to point at Michael with his finger and squeal. Then Mike would take off running as fast as he could with the enraged monkey in hot pursuit.

Festus would also grab our poor chickens and roll them across the yard in the powdery dust. They clucked for all they were worth, but there was no mercy extended to them by Festus. At night, he would sleep in under all those chickens with just his two black eyes visible staring out from under a mass of feathers, feeling that he was very much protected from the night critters of Africa. During the day as I sat out in my lawn chair, he would come up and try to grab my coffee cup away from me. If he couldn't get it, he'd open the breezeway door, rush in and steal some food and get out before the kids could catch him. We knew exactly what the expression "more fun than a barrel of monkeys" meant.

The kids also became the proud owners of the cutest little dik-dik (miniature antelope) named Rudolph. Its mother had been killed, so the kids were very happy to be its adoptive parents. Our whole family loved him and carefully watched over him, feeding him milk in a baby bottle. Henry and Mike built him a little place to stay with a fenced-in yard. He was happy out in the sunshine where he could run and play. Then one day our new addition to the family was bitten by a poisonous snake and died in a couple of hours. Our whole family felt a deep loss



Mark with pet dik-dik Rudolph (a miniature antelope).

because he had seemed to love living with us.

One day Henry came home with some eggs he had found out in the bush in a wild guinea fowl nest. He decided to put them under one of our setting hens. After a few weeks, out hatched some beautiful black and white guineas. They didn't know they weren't chickens, so they followed the old mother hen around and she showed them how to scratch for bugs and worms. They were truly a happy chicken family.

Later on we had one lonely little baby chicken that had no mother to take care of it, so Henry decided he would be its mother. As he walked around the yard, he clucked and the baby chicken would follow. He would use his foot to scratch for worms and bugs, and so did the baby chicken. The little chick was doing



Robin and Mark in the front yard at Lubagha mission.

really well until one day when I accidentally stepped on it, and that was the end of that poor baby chick. I felt absolutely terrible over it.

Our older chickens also had a difficult time trying to survive all the dangers of African life. Frequently a hawk would

swoop down out of the sky, grab one of our unsuspecting chickens, sinking his curving talons into it, and fly off with it into the wild blue yonder. If the old rooster saw him in time, he would make a loud cry to warn the hens and the baby chickens, and they would all run under the car or under a brush pile. So all of our pets had to struggle to survive.

One pet the kids had was a very disagreeable one, a beautiful black and white goat. He was very proud and decided he would be the master of the mission. The minute any one of us went out the breezeway door, he ran over and gave him a big butt with his head, trying to knock him down. We decided he brought more pain than pleasure, so we let an African take him home with him

where he ended up becoming goat burgers. Many of the Africans came to see our children's "zoo" and were surprised. They didn't collect pets as we did. The kids also kept the normal pets that most American children have. We had a number of dogs over the years. Our first two were lovely little Dachshunds named Jack and Jill. They were very good hunters, but nosy. Jill got her head stuck in a plastic bottle one time, and we had to give her a hand in removing it.

We had several Rhodesian Ridgeback hounds, too, which made good hunters as well as good pets. The kids gave them all American names such as Brownie Junior, Bobby, and Rudolph—with the exception of one that they named Ingwe. They were very sturdy, strong dogs. Poor Ingwe was run over one day with the car, but managed to survive and live many years. In later years, Mark and Kim were able to have two more Dachshunds by the names of Rudolph and Rantu. Our children really treated those dogs like humans. We had some very lucky pets.

Preaching in the villages

While our children were enjoying their pets and experiences with the people coming to the mission, John was having his own cultural encounters on his preaching trips to the villages. Here are a few samples gleaned from his reports home:

"The second trip carried us to the extreme northernmost border of Malawi on the Songwe River. Looking across the river, we could see Tanzania on the other side. These are the Nyachusa people, these residents along the border, with their own distinct language and customs. A fascinating feature of their life is their habit of building beds out of banana leaves which can float. It's actually a little boat, this bed, which is so constructed because of the local flooding conditions. Sometimes the river rises during the rainy season while the people are asleep. But with this bed there is no fear of drowning. It simply rises with the water and floats above the danger. The sleeper bobs peacefully above the



A typical house in the village.

flood and is no worse for the experience when arising.

“The trip to the lakeshore churches was a memorable experience. This was the first time that I visited this particular part of the work. Because of the remoteness of these churches, and due to commitments to other places, I failed to visit them last year, but at last the time had come for a visit to them. So it was that my wife dropped four African preachers and myself on the lakeshore near Chiweta for the twelve mile hike to Zunga, where we planned to begin our five day preaching tour. We decided to start the tour with the most distant church, then work our way back from church to church, ending up where Ann had originally dropped us. Then she could pick us up on Sunday afternoon, after we had worshipped with the Chiweta brethren.

“Our journey began on a low plain, but soon developed into the hardest walk I have ever experienced. There are no roads on this route. Footpaths are the only way to visit the churches unless



Malawi preachers studying Bible lessons in dormitory at Lubagha mission.

you go by dugout canoe. As it developed, I came to wish I had gone by canoe!

“After a brief stop at Mulowe, where we visited with the brethren and took some food, we resumed our walk to Zunga, leaving Amin Harawa, one of our preachers, there until our return. That evening we arrived at Zunga village. We slept at the house of Lenford Kondowe, a young man interested in the gospel who treated us very kindly (Lenford was baptized two days later).

“The next morning we set off for the house of Benjamin Ngwira, the preacher for the Zunga and Old Sarawe churches. His house was two more miles down the path which by now was better fit for goats than man, strewn with boulders, hills and ravines. At last we came to a little sign at the edge of the path pointing up the mountainside, with words scratched by ball point pen in fancy letters: “Church of Christ.” A little farther up the path was a temporary meeting house made of pole and grass with one side open and the branches of an overhanging shade tree as a roof. In this area the mountains plunge directly into the lake. I

looked around to see where Ngwira's house might be. The African brethren with me pointed up the mountain. And there, about half way up, perched on the mountainside like an eagle's nest, was the home of Benjamin Ngwira. Several minutes later, after a laborious climb up the mountain, we arrived gasping for breath.

"Benjamin Ngwira is an older man, slight of frame and slow when he moves. He wears a little black beret. His face shows the wear and tear of life on the lake. He is a fisherman, going out daily with hooks and nets in his dugout canoe. He eats fish each day because greens and vegetables can not grow well in these rocks. Brother Ngwira has only been in the Lord's church for a little over a year. He had resolved in his heart that, when our preachers came, he would obey the gospel and become a part of the Lord's church. And so it was, when two of our brethren passed through last year, someone ran to the shore where Ben was tending his nets and told him preachers from the Church of Christ were here. Like Peter, he dropped his nets and hurried to overtake them on the path. The same day, Ngwira was baptized into Christ. Now, brother Ngwira is a real force for Christ. That night we stayed with him and the next day, with his help, we visited at Old Sarawe and met with the church at Zunga.

"One particularly gratifying experience for me was to have part in the conversion of a deaf and mute boy near us here at the mission. I had often noticed him as he herded cattle in the bush nearby, and wondered if it would be possible for him to be taught by us. Taking two of our preachers, Kemelton and Amin Harawa, I invited the young man to our office. There, through homemade sign language, we taught him about Christ's death for our sins, about heaven and hell, about Christ's church, and how we are to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and be immersed for the forgiveness of sins (Kemelton signed to him that Jesus is God's son by first pointing to Heaven, and then imitating a mother nursing her child!). To my amazement, the deafmute under-

stood perfectly, and confessed Christ with head and grunts. He was then buried with his Lord in baptism. He has not missed a Sunday at services yet. These are just some of the exciting experiences we have had in this work over a two month period just past. We are thankful to God daily to have had a part in this wonderful work of leading men to Christ here in Malawi, Africa.”

The Second Time Around

John was so busy preaching daily, he couldn't begin to keep up with all of the opportunities that he had to teach God's word. He used an interpreter while he preached the first two years we were there, but after that he started preaching on his own. He became very fluent in the local language of Chitumbuka.

Sad news from home

After two years in Africa we received the sad news of the death of John's dad in California. It was decided it was too expensive for us all to go home for the funeral, so John would go home alone. He left for the States while the four kids and I stayed behind. I'll never forget how lonely I felt after he left. Here I was far away from him in Africa. It still frightened me to think I lived in a land so far away from my mom and dad. Now my husband was gone, but I knew I'd make it because the Lord was with me daily. After John had been gone for one month, I began to be anxious for him to return.

Then the letter came from John telling me that his mom had had a nervous breakdown and we would have to take care of her in the States until she was feeling better. He told me to pack up everything that we needed and to come on home. Oh, I was absolutely terrified of travelling so far with four children! I was still very much an Ozark girl who felt very inadequate dealing with international health records, passports, plane tickets, etc. John had always taken care of all of this type thing. But as much as I dreaded it, it was time for the Ozark girl to learn how to do these things on her own.

With Doyle Gilliam's help, I was booked on East African

Airways, packed my bags, and finally with three of my four kids trailing behind me and Mark who was 2 1/2 years old in my arms, plus my purse and hand luggage, we boarded the plane. Henry, Michael and Robin were heavy-laden with pieces of hand luggage, too. I felt so sorry for them. But we somehow all got seated and strapped in, and we were on our way but, without doubt, that was the hardest journey of my life. The fact that I was afraid contributed to it and on top of that the plane was having mechanical troubles. A wing was about to fall off! So we were forced to land in Entebbe, Uganda so that they could work on the plane.

I was very uncomfortable because there were armed guards looking at everyone suspiciously as we came off the plane. I had the feeling that I might never see home again. (This was the same airport the Israelis later raided to free Jewish hostages being held by Idi Amin). I went up to the desk and begged them to send a telegram to my husband informing him that we were going to be delayed there so he wouldn't worry when I didn't arrive as scheduled. Of course, they didn't do it! But they did put us in a hotel for the day, where we mostly stayed inside because I was afraid to go outside with four kids. Later that night, they told us it was time to board again.

I was anxious to be on my way again to get home to see John and my parents. Two years is a long time to go without your mama.

On the plane, my ears picked up the beautiful accent of a fellow American. My, how good that sounded to me! I rushed back to meet them to see where they were from and where they were going. I know now I must have seemed like a poor stray dog starved for friendship. I thought, if I can keep my eye on them, I'll somehow reach America again. They were very kind and friendly, and I really needed that because of the insecurity I felt.

After many hours (which seemed like days), we stopped in London. Lo and behold, the plane I was supposed to board had engine trouble, so we were put in a hotel again. I almost cried, I

was so upset. I thought that if I could get back to my beloved Ozark mountains, the best place on earth to me, I'd never leave them again. We were all bone tired. The hand luggage had become heavier than when we first started out and our arms felt as though they had all been pulled out of their sockets and just sort of dangled as we walked. Mark had worn a permanent indentation in my side that has never gone away to this day. I was so afraid I would get separated from one of my precious babies in that huge London airport. As I went up to the desk, I put Henry and Mike in charge of watching Mark and Robin and keeping an eye on the hand luggage. As I tried to take care of the business at the desk, I kept trying to watch the kids. I know they are probably still talking at the London airport about the inexperienced woman trying to travel halfway around the world with four kids. But after so many hours, it was time to board again and leave for New York. If I could just make it there, I felt I'd be home free.

By the time we reached New York, I was so tired I could hardly see. It seemed as though I'd been awake for weeks. Mark clung to me at all times. By this time, he had become a permanent fixture on my hip. We were truly Siamese twins. I knew I'd have to have surgery to have him removed.

Anyway, I was excited that I was back on that gorgeous American soil. I called John straight away. He was very happy to hear because he didn't have a clue where I was in the world, and he had heard on the news that an East African Airliner had gone down. God was so good to me. He had helped me get home, otherwise I might still be up there in the sky somewhere. I had a very good visit with my mom, dad, brothers and sisters, then we moved down to Mobile for the period of time we would be in the States so that we could become better acquainted with our sponsoring congregation. We were there for five months taking care of John's mother until she was able to be left with her mother in Denver. I might add, she was baptized into Christ by

John Mancill during this time.

Africa bound again

We then said our sad good-bys to all the new Christian friends we had made at Pleasant Valley and went up to Missouri to tell my family good-by once more before we headed back for our African bush home so very far away. By this time I knew just how far away it really was. I knew already the real meaning of being homesick, especially for my mom. I told her, "Mom, don't think of my being gone for three years, but only for three days, because I can be home that quickly if you need me." I told myself all kinds of things that would help me to be able to go. I knew the Scripture as well as anyone in Matthew 10:37 that says, *"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,"* but it was still just as hard for me thinking how long three years was going to be. Two years had seemed a mighty long time, but I was still excited about getting back into the African



Our family in the London airport.

work again. We had so much to do and accomplish for our Lord. After all, He had done so much for me. How could I refuse? I decided I would try to be like Ruth the Moabite as she went with Naomi. I would go with John wherever he went; where he slept I would sleep. If in an African hut, I would sleep there too. Where he preached, I would listen. The African people would be my people, their land would be my land. I prayed about this and asked God to help me, and He did. I grew to love those people with all my heart and felt this was where I truly belonged. Not only John and I loved it, but every one of our children did, and all of them felt we were truly at home, even though so many things were different from what we had grown up with.

We headed back for Malawi the end of May 1971 to live for



On my way to Malawi again.

the next three years. We had a good trip over. By this time we all felt like seasoned travellers. I was glad John was taking charge of all the travel documents again while I took care of the children at the many different airports.

We arrived safe and sound in Malawi, checking in at the Malawi Boma, telling them we were back, and also going to the American Embassy to inform them that we were in the country in case it was necessary for them to get us out in an emergency.

Oh, how excited Henry, Mike, and Robin were to be home! Mark didn't really care as long as he was with the family, because he was so young.

As soon as we were settled in again at the mission, John wrote to our sponsoring congregation at Pleasant Valley and our other supporters about our arrival:



The boys are happy to be on the airplane again for Africa.

“Well, here we are greeting you from the ‘dark continent’ again! We had a wonderful trip from Springfield, Missouri to Malawi, Africa on our return for our second tour in the African work. We had several hours of lay-over in Rome on our way, stopping off for an afternoon tour of that famous old city, with a visit to many of the principal places, including the Vatican. Then, late that night, we were on an Italian flight to Nairobi, Kenya. Early the next morning, we touched down on the African continent, and it was great to breathe the invigorating air of Kenya for some hours while waiting for our next connection to Malawi. Then, after another three or four hours’ journey, our jet touched down at Chileka airport, and we were in Blantyre, the principal city of Malawi. The next morning was Sunday, so we met to break bread with the church in Blantyre. This was also the last Sunday that the Doyle Gilliams were going to be in Malawi, so the church held a going-away party for them immediately after the worship services. The African brethren gave Doyle a briefcase so that he would look very important while flying to America. Sister Gilliam received African-made doilies, a necklace, and a head pad. This head pad is woven from straw into the shape of a donut, and is made so that ladies can carry loads on their heads. Everybody got a kick out of imagining Louise carrying the family’s hand luggage on her head into the plane.

“Our trip to the north was a dusty but enjoyable one. Roads half-way up the country have been improved greatly since we were here six months ago. There is now pavement from Blantyre to Lilongwe, or for about 200 miles of our 500 mile trip home. That first night we stayed at Mponela Bible school, and then drove on to Lubagha the next day. There we found the house neatly cleaned and the grass hacked low to the ground. It was great to see the smiling faces of the mission foreman, Mofati, and all the grasscutters. We had many visitors who brought us oranges and peanuts as condolence gifts for the loss of my father. Preachers and brethren have dropped by in a steady stream to greet us.

"The brethren lost no time putting me back to work! That first week after my arrival found them from various places expecting me to be with them in their gospel meetings, and I have been out every Sunday since to preach at these meetings. So far the meetings have all been about 30 to 60 miles from the house. Brethren at Edundu, Madedi, and here at Lubagha have held meetings. Now I am scheduled to visit meetings at Ekayiweni (40 miles away), Mperembe (30 miles), and Rumphu (17 miles). These meetings are a great source of strength to the Christians here in the north, and it is always a pleasure to go. At Madedi, a new place, 23 were baptized at their meeting. Edundu had six baptized. It is one of the older congregations in the North.

"Now we are looking forward to our preacher training school in September. Also, as soon as we have the camper, we will be helping to hold more preacher training schools out in the areas farther away from home. Please continue to pray for us. We appreciate so very much all the fine support you have given to this work."

Adding on a bedroom

After some time had passed, we decided that we needed another bedroom added to the house, as our family was having a hard time fitting into two bedrooms. The kids were getting bigger and needed more space. Neither John nor I knew anything about building, but we knew this should pose no problem. We would just hire a local builder and get started on the project right away. I was very excited about it. I asked John to please buy the biggest windows possible so we'd have plenty of light. I wanted all of that natural light I could get, since we didn't have any of the artificial. He found some lovely big windows to put in it and I could hardly wait until it was finished. We got many people involved in making the bricks, metal roofing sheets bought for the roof, paint for the walls, etc. A builder was found and he went to work putting up the walls. Things went very well until one day he got drunk on corn liquor, then became speechless,

went blind and died, all in a matter of hours. We felt very sad about this. Then we started looking for another builder. After Mofati had searched far and wide, he found us another builder who claimed that he knew the building trade very well and would be very happy to finish building the bedroom we had started. My, were we happy! I could just visualize that beautiful room all finished with all of God's sunlight coming in through those big windows John had bought for me. We never doubted even once that the builder was not the very best in the valley. He came to work daily, and I was satisfied. My room was going up. Things were being accomplished.

However, I began to notice that where one wall met another, they sort of curved toward one another instead of meeting at a right angle. Nevertheless, we had walls up, even though very crooked. When it was time to pour the cement floors, I told him to please add some red powder in with the cement so that my floor would be wine-coloured instead of the typical grey because once this colour of floor was polished with paste wax it was very pretty and shiny as glass. The man started pouring. So far so good. After doing half of it, however, he decided he was tired and decided to go on home. I told Kemelton I was worried that when he came back to pour the other half of the floor the halves would not join smoothly, and they wouldn't look right. Kemelton reassured me that the builder would know how to do that.

The next day our builder came back bright and early saying, "Let me get this floor finished for you." He spoke with such an air of confidence that I just knew all would be well, even though my walls didn't look like much. He worked through the day pouring, smoothing it down, pouring again, smoothing it down. Finally, it was all finished. When I saw the finished product, I almost cried! Here was one huge ugly scar that ran the whole width of the bedroom. And that's how it dried. You could almost stump your toe on it if you walked barefoot. But we got out the paste wax and polished it until that scar shone along with the rest

of the floor. I ended up covering most of it with an area rug (but the part that stuck out was still a beautiful scar to me). I was so excited about our new bedroom and all the extra space I now had! Truly God had blessed us again as He had done so many times before since we had reached that lovely, fruitful land.

Christmas in Malawi

Our Christmas times in Malawi were quite a bit different than in the States. We would often make a 300-mile trip to Lilongwe to find what we could in the shops. In the earlier years, we would drive the 500 miles to Blantyre because there were more things there to choose from. However, even that was greatly limited. But it was so much fun for all of our family to buy gifts for one another. Most of our gifts would usually end up being hand-made carvings by the African carvers, which I dearly loved. For all of our Malawian workers on the mission we would always buy rice, meat, tea leaves, sugar, milk and hard candies for their children



An "Air Malawi" carrier.

so that they could have a Christmas dinner and their children could enjoy some sweets. They were always so glad to get their Christmas packages, and we loved to see their happy, smiling faces.

One Christmas time in particular was so hard on our family that I shall never forget it. We decided to take our big old "white elephant" camper to Blantyre to do some shopping and get ready for the coming holidays. While there, the camper decided it had done all the travelling it was going to do and was going to have a much needed rest. We found a shade tree mechanic to look it over and see what could be done. He told us that the engine needed an overhaul, but that it was just a small job to him and that he'd have our camper in good shape in no time at all. We always seemed to forget that African time and European time are two completely different things. After many days and still no camper, John decided to borrow a car to take me and the kids back to the North because we were afraid that they were going to get behind in their school courses. After delivering us to the North, he had



The mission looks good to us after being away.

to return to the South with the borrowed vehicle, saying he was sure that the camper would be ready in another week. Little did we dream that Christmas would come and go, and he would still be stranded in the South with no way to get back, because that camper seemed determined to stay down there.

The children and I went ahead and began preparing for Christmas anyway. We found a cedar tree out in the bush and decorated it with homemade decorations until it looked really pretty. Then one of our very kind office workers, Naison Kumwenda said, "Please come to our house for Christmas supper." We were thrilled because of his invitation and told him that we would love to come. So we dressed nicely for the occasion and walked down over the hill in the dark African night to their humble little home where they invited us in and seated us around a small table decorated by a beautiful white tablecloth which had embroidered flowers all around it. In the middle sat a little hurricane lantern to give light to eat by. Kumwenda entered the room wearing his nicest dress coat and tie while his wife was in her finest dress. Their young children came in and knelt before us on their little knees, to greet us as is their custom.

Then Kumwenda passed a dish pan with water in it for each of us to wash our hands in before we ate. They had set huge bowls of sima, chicken and rice on the table for us to eat. After having served us this lovely supper, they then brought in a big pot of hot tea with milk in it and plenty of scones (rolls) so that we were completely filled when we left that house. I was absolutely awed by their hospitality to us. They had shared their Christmas meal with us—and I knew how expensive it was for them to do this—but they knew that the children and I were alone in a foreign land and that John was away. I knew then exactly what that Scripture meant in Mark 10:29,30 in which Jesus promised that, if we forsake lands and family in His service, we shall be given houses, mothers, brothers and sisters in this world in addition to eternal life in the world to come. In the church we

have a world-wide spiritual family wherever we go that cares for us.

A few days later, John got the big white monster back up to the north. We never trusted it much after that.

Malawi Travels

I do not want to leave out some of the fun times that we had over the years. Among the things I enjoyed most were our trips to Blantyre where we visited other American missionaries. We truly loved our African brethren, but it was so good to be with our friends from our own homeland. It was such a blessing to visit Namikango Mission over the years with the Wilks, Shelburns, Huttons, and Albrights. We had a wonderful closeness with them. Not only were we all brothers and sisters in Christ, but we were also fellow Americans, spoke the same language and had the same customs and cultural background.

What a treat it was on Sunday evening to gather together to worship God in English songs and hear His Holy Word in our native tongue.

Then on Monday we would drive the 35 miles over a tarmac road into Blantyre to do my favorite kind of shopping for the beautiful Malawi carvings. I learned how to haggle with the souvenir salesmen to bring them down to a fair price (the price they should have asked for in the first place). I could spend hours doing that. With their carvings all lined up on the sidewalk, the vendors would all be shouting to me at once, "Here, Madam, I can make too cheap for you! Special price for you, Madam!" I would tell them, "I can only hear you one at a time." By the end of the day, I had bought carvings of every description and beautiful African paintings of animals, lake scenes and bowls of fruit. But John was never impressed. He could not stand the wheeling and dealing. He loved the paintings and carvings but was not willing to go through what you had to do to get them. He also hated having to carry all those heavy carved heads and chairs back to the States. He said both his arms were made longer from having them pulled out of the sockets because of the weight of

these things.

By the time the beautiful Malawi sun was sinking low in the west, we would be headed back to Namikango for a good supper and visit, capped off with a devotional and then to bed. I was very happy with all my treasures, and John was happy because he had found supplies for the mission. Also, he knew he would be taking me back to the bush for another four months or so and wouldn't be bothered with any more souvenir trips in the near future.

Paddy Paws

A terrible thing happened on one of these trips that I would even describe as tragic—at least for the Thiesen family. While we were in Blantyre, we would buy special goodies that we couldn't get in the north for months at a time. One of these special treats happened to be cheese. I was so excited because I had bought five blocks of Gouda cheese, all encased in wax, imported from Holland. I knew that by rationing it out to the family it would last us for several weeks. It was very expensive, which was why I hadn't bought even more.

As we lay dreaming in our beds that night of all the good things that we had purchased for the weeks ahead, there came a certain big, fat, sad-eyed dog by the name of Paddy Paws who belonged to the Jack Huttons and whom we all loved. He knew we had cheese tucked away in a special place, knew we were headed back to the north on the morrow and knew he must have his share then or never. So he did, one whole block, plus part of another. Needless to say, I was angry with Paddy Paws. However, I couldn't blame him much, since cheese was very hard to come by. The next day we gathered up all our treats, said good-by and headed back to Lubagha Mission, our beloved bush home.

Retreats

One year we decided, along with other missionaries, it would be wonderful for us if we could start having retreats where we would all get together to study God's word so that we would be edified and encouraged by being together. We found out the longer we were there in that beautiful land that there was more and more work to be done. Everything was all out-go with not enough being put back in. We needed our own faith strengthened by studies with English speakers. We could also be spiritually uplifted by some good English songs. On some of our retreats, we met on the lake where we rented a dormitory with several individual rooms. During the day we followed a schedule of studies, with our husbands taking turns teaching in our native tongue. In that way we didn't miss a word. At night our children would put on skits for the adults. It truly was a wonderful experience for all of us. The Wilks and the Shelburns brought their house workers with them to cook our food for us.

On one of our retreats we rented facilities from the Anglicans at Chilema Mission near Zomba and called missionaries from all over central Africa. It was just great. We met so many fine Christians. It was at this particular retreat that something happened I shall not soon forget. We were all packing up to go home after having heard inspiring sermons from a guest speaker. We had praised our God in song and had all been edified. Now it was time to go back to our separate works in various places. In Malawi, anytime you leave a place you always go to the bathroom before you leave, because bathrooms are few and far between. So this I did, or at least tried to do. I asked John to wait; I would hurry. I rushed into the dormitory, opened the restroom door and there, partway in and partway out of the stool, was the largest green boomslang snake that had ever been made. Part of him came several feet out of the stool onto the floor. He just dared me to come on in. I told myself that I didn't need to go anyway and screamed at the top of my lungs. I ran out of there

faster than the speed of sound. Several African men came and killed it with sticks. I might add that they did this through a window from outside. I might add again how well our God looked after us day by day, year by year. TRULY OUR GOD IS GREAT.

Terror in the night

One time that really stands out in my mind is the night we had parked our big white elephant of a camper in a forest just outside Mzuzu. We had a preaching trip scheduled to Chikangawa on that Sunday morning, so we decided that since it was such a long trip, we would drive part way there, camp for the night, and continue on the next morning. Little did we know the terror that our minds and bodies would experience in the middle of that dark night.

Earlier that evening some soldiers who were out patrolling in the same forest came to our camper to tell us that the President of Malawi was coming to Mzuzu the next day by that same forest route and that we'd have to move on and find some other place



Our Mercedes Benz camper — the “White Elephant.”

to stay the night. John explained who we were and where we were going the next day, so the officer in charge agreed it would be okay for us to stay. He promised he'd tell the next patrol coming on at midnight so that we wouldn't be troubled any more. So, we were content with that and got ourselves all bedded down for the night.

Shortly after midnight, we came to the conclusion that we would not be going on any more preaching trips—ever. Our lives were going to be snuffed out that very night. We heard the sound of vehicles screeching to a halt and of heavy boots pounding all around outside. Bright lights flashed into our camper and someone was screaming at the top of his lungs, "Come out! Come out! Who are you? What are you doing here?" John was desperately trying to get his pants on but running two feet down one pant leg. Meanwhile, we heard the ominous sound of many rifle bolts being cocked. Finally, John made it out the door where he found the camper surrounded by soldiers, every one of them pointing his rifle at him! John began telling them who he was, just a lonely missionary from Lubagha Mission who would not harm a flea. Luckily, one soldier recognized him and said, "Oh, yes, I know him. That's Tiseni from Lubagha, he's okay." We wanted to embrace that soldier but didn't since that was against their custom. Never again did we camp anywhere near where the President was going to be passing. We were thankful we had escaped and that we would be fulfilling our commitment the next day.

The new bakery

One thing we really missed in those beginning years was store-bought bread. I had to bake all of our bread, and it seemed a never-ending job with a big family like ours. Sifting flour was endless since it was loaded with bugs. At first, I threw the flour away, but then I realized that I would never have bread, cakes or cinnamon rolls again. So I decided I must sift, sift, and sift again. This took some getting used to since I had never had buggy flour in the States.

So when the day came that a bakery was put in at Mzuzu, the whole family was very elated. We immediately started buying all of our bread there. One thing about it we didn't care for, though, was the way the dough was prepared. One day while we were there buying bread, someone came out the door that opened to the back where the bread was made. And there, appearing for just a moment like a vision through the open door before our astonished eyes, we saw several African bakers, wearing their official white baking hats and coats, leaping up and down on the bread dough in the middle of the floor with their bare feet! I thought, are my eyes betraying me or did I see what I thought I saw? We went ahead and bought our bread as usual and had a good laugh all the way back to the mission. We felt it better to laugh than cry.

One thing about the bread—it became stale by the next day and was very crumbly. One day, as John drove down the road eating the sandwich I had packed for him, the road was so rough and the bread so dry, it all crumbled right out of his hand, and he was left holding only a piece of tough Mhuju beef. The same day his bananas resting on the dash of the pickup were thrown around and jostled so much by the bumpy road that they were literally mashed well enough for making banana bread. Sometimes we were able to laugh and see the humour in these situations, and other times we laughed a bit hysterically and without humour.

A village wedding

We had many opportunities to attend traditional African weddings. The one that stands out the most is the beautiful wedding of Peter and Pat Dalum, held at the village of our area sub-chief, Mwahenga. Peter was an American Peace Corps worker who had lived in the village in a mud house with a thatched roof for almost two years when his bride-to-be came over for the wedding. We were so excited to be attending the ceremony. There were many people there to witness such a very unusual scene. The Africans were all very excited and happy that an American couple would be married in their village.



Dr. Peter Dalum with wife Pat and children, Kate and Kevin.
The Dalums were married in a traditional village wedding.

They had erected a little sunshelter for the couple to sit under, which they did for the whole day while Africans danced for them. We especially enjoyed the dancer who danced covered in animal skins. They were presented many different gifts while a professional master of ceremonies told in a loud voice whom each was from and its value. It truly was an exciting and different kind of day. Peter and Pat left for the United States shortly thereafter where he attended medical school and became a doctor. Years later, it was so wonderful to meet them back in Africa again, now with two children, where Peter was treating the local people and also became our family doctor.



Malawi traditional dancers.

Crime doesn't pay

We noticed over the years that we were there that petty thievery was a bad habit of many, even though if a thief were caught he could find himself in a not so pleasant predicament. One such time when we were inside the house, we heard an extremely loud commotion going on in our front yard. We all ran out to see what was taking place. Across our yard ran a terrified young man with many Africans in hot pursuit, including our grasscutters. They were shouting "THIEF!" as they threw stones, sticks, bricks and anything else they could lay their hands upon. The thief was actually being stoned to death in our front yard! He was being hit in the face and the blood was pouring down his cheeks as John ran out shouting, "Stop! Stop! You are going to kill him!"

The young thief was drunk and didn't really know what was going on or happening to him. Our workers explained to us that he had stolen clothing from someone's clothes line. They said

that this was very bad, so they personally were going to take care of the matter. The thief did not want John to take him to the police and still was trying to get away. John explained to him that he was going to be killed then and there in our front yard if he didn't get in the car immediately so he could be taken to the police. At that moment, a brick came sailing overhead from somewhere in the crowd and slammed into the thief's face, and the crowd started moving in for the kill. Kumwenda and another one of our office staff forced the thief quickly into the back seat of our car, sitting on top of him while John slammed the car into gear and whisked them from the yard to the Rumphu police station.

We saw things of this nature at different times regarding thieves. In Malawi, there is open season on thieves and chasing them is much like a rabbit hunt. As the people chase a thief, they whistle loudly so that people way up ahead are alerted and can join in the chase too. The thief is hemmed in and does not have a chance to escape. So stealing seems to be a very hazardous occupation there.

Out of gas

My husband had a very hair-raising experience that happened to him on one of his preaching trips that made us realize we were in a foreign country, no matter how much we felt at home. He had picked up one of his preachers, Watson Ndhlovu, and gone over close to the Zambian border in the Mzimba District, about 150 miles from home, when his petrol gauge began to get very low. There was no petrol to buy, as there was an extreme shortage in the country, so he stopped and emptied into the fuel tank the contents of the spare Jerry tin which he always carried in the back of the pickup. What he did not know was that there was rain water mixed in with the fuel. So he didn't get very far when the engine just stopped.

The only thing he knew to do was to try to hitch-hike back

the 150 miles to the mission where he had some more petrol. So, he and Watson walked to the small town of Lodjwa where they caught a ride with some Malawi Young Pioneers. They put John and Watson in the back of their truck and headed straight to the police station at Champira, where they turned them over to the police. The police chief took them to his office and demanded to know who they were and where they were going. John started talking a mile a minute, explaining who he was and what had happened. The police chief looked at him very doubtfully and told him, "How do I know you are not an enemy from Zambia trying to deceive me?" Then he told John, "I can detain you indefinitely for this."

By this time, John and Watson were absolutely terrified and quaking in their boots. John felt he was going to disappear in a jail cell, never to see his family again. He never realized it was such a crime to get water in his petrol tank. After interrogating him for 45 minutes, the chief said, "I'm going to let you go, but you must report to the police at Mzimba." So the two criminals caught a ride to Mzimba and checked into the police station there and told the police that they would rent a room to spend the night there, then go on to Rumphu the next day. That night, the police came to their room and questioned them further.

The next morning, they happily caught a bus headed for Ekwendeni. But, lo and behold, the rains came and beat upon those roads, and they became terribly muddy, and the bus became stuck in the mountains. All the passengers pushed, including the two preachers. They ended up waiting by the side of the road until it dried off some, and then while they were pushing the bus again, it ran off the road and straight out into the forest where, after much difficulty, the driver finally got it turned around and back on the road. The dilapidated bus was in such very bad shape that the seat that John and Watson were sitting on in the last row in the rear was loose, and at every bump it came up and smacked them on the backside. Finally, they learned just to stand up when



A Malawi bus.

they saw a bump coming to avoid being whopped. The people who sat across the aisle from them had a terrible experience. Their seat came completely off and threw them all out on the floor.

Finally, after hours and hours, and with very tired, weary bodies, they reached Ekwendeni and caught a ride to Mzokoto, three miles across the river from our house. They walked down to the river, hired a canoe to cross, and then came on home. The next day, they took the other car, along with Henry and a fresh supply of petrol, and began the 150 mile trip back to Lodjwa to try and get the pickup home. They drained the tank, blew out the petrol lines, poured in new fuel, then pulled it until they got it started and returned to the mission.

John and Watson had had a hard trip but could still sum it up as a very good trip because they had scattered some seed in a brand new area where the gospel had not been preached before.

Slowed down for Jesus

One exciting teaching experience I had that I felt must be put in my book still excites me to this day. On one of my many trips to Mzuzu to do the banking, I started out on it like any of the other trips I'd been on. I was hurrying desperately trying to reach the bank before closing time, but just as I got to the city limits, I saw Malawi Young Pioneers (the president's para-military youth group) standing all along the sides of the road guarding it. I so hoped they wouldn't pull me over, as I was so late and I'd driven 50 miles over a dirt road just to get the banking done. But my hopes were soon dashed as they held up their hand to me and said, "Pull your car off the road, stop your engine and take out your keys, as His Excellency, Kamuzu Banda, the president, will be travelling down this road soon." I said, "Please let me go on, as I must reach the bank before it closes. I have just driven 50



John built me a home-made grill.

miles.” They said, “Sorry, Madam, but you must wait here.” They told me to get out of the car to wait for the president to pass by. My, was I worried, because I knew I’d be forced to come back over that same dirt road again the next day.

After I got out of the car, the two MYPs asked me who I was, where I came from, and what I was doing in Malawi. I told them I was a missionary with my husband and where we lived. They started asking one question after another, all about Jesus and the church. I was so thrilled, I forgot all about the bank and why I was on the road. We talked and discussed for over one and a half



Mark and I hiking to a gospel meeting in a village far from the car.

hours, and they wanted tracts to tell them more. I said, “I’ll send you plenty, plus I’ll contact a preacher to help you.” Meanwhile, the president came by at the end of our study, we waved to him, then the MYPs told me I could go. They got in the car with me, and I took them on into town where I found the bank still open.

I went back to the mission very elated, and John helped me to send them tracts. They wrote us later wanting to be baptized into Christ. We contacted a native preacher in their area to baptize them.

What had started out a nerve-racking delay for me turned out to be one of the most exciting studies that I had ever taught. It taught me that some things that seem to be the most important aren't at all. That day this hurrying American got slowed down for a very important lesson that was for me as well as them.

Gospel meetings

All the gospel meetings that we went to were all-day affairs. The "Ungano" (meeting) would usually start around 9:00 A.M. and continue until noon when we would all stop for a good lunch of sima and chicken. We would sit out under a shade tree until the host led us into a cool village hut, seating us at a table with a



Mark going mountain climbing at age 10.

beautiful embroidered table cloth. Then he would hold an “mbali” (wash pan) of water for each one of us to wash in before we ate the sima and chicken with our hands. My, but it tasted good after being out in the village all morning! Then, after lunch, we would continue on with the rest of the speakers. Each preacher got up and did his very best. If a preacher spoke too long, they would often send him a note telling him to sit down because his time was up.

In one such meeting, as the day was nearing the end, and it was time for the Lord’s Supper (they saved this until next to the last speaker), one of the preachers got up and started speaking about the Lord’s Supper. All we women, along with our children, were sitting on a mat in the hot sun (the men sat on the chairs) when this preacher arose to speak. After he had preached for one and a half hours (they forgot to send him a note) some of the ladies with their young babies began to squirm, as it was very hot in the sun. Also, the mat was beginning to feel quite hard on the ground since six other preachers before this one had taken their turns. I’m afraid I was no exception. I was also squirming. Noting our restlessness, the speaker informed us that “Satana” (the devil) had entered into us, causing us to become so tired. I felt really badly that he had said that. Even though I was hot and tired, I tried to control my squirming for the rest of the day.

Nevertheless, we heard some good lessons that day, even though the physical comforts could have been better.

I don’t want to leave this chapter on our travels in Malawi without including an exciting vacation trip our family made to the neighbouring African states to the west and south of Malawi in 1972. It was the only vacation we took during the years we were in Africa, but it was the most memorable of our lives. Here is John’s report to our supporters of that experience after we got back:

“We have just returned from a highly enjoyable journey to South Africa and the lectureships at Southern African Bible

School in Benoni. There it was our pleasure to meet the Judds and greet them upon their return to Africa as they stopped off at the lectureships on their way north to Rhodesia. We had deliberately planned our vacation to coincide with the lectureships and the Judds' arrival.

"The 2,000 mile trip down was one of the most memorable experiences we have had, as we stopped off to see the spectacular Victoria Falls at Livingstone, Zambia, and the various big game parks along the way. At Wankie Game Park in Rhodesia we saw many elephants and giraffes. On one occasion, a big bull elephant was irritated by the car in front of us which had deliberately blocked his way in order to make him charge so that the passengers could take an exciting photo of a charging elephant. It may have been fun for them in their speedy little passenger car, but for us in the big, sluggish camper it was no fun being left alone with an angry elephant and no place to turn around to get away. However, happily for us, the elephant wasn't interested in killing any tourists that day but decided to continue on his way, and we breathed a sigh of relief as we watched him lumbering off.

"The lectureships at Benoni were an uplifting experience for us. About 300 packed a big tent in the parking lot each day to hear brother Frank Pack of Pepperdine College and other preach-



Crossing the Rukuru River in a canoe.

ers from South Africa, Rhodesia and Uganda speak on various timely subjects. At night the lectures shifted to a school auditorium which was filled to capacity. The singing was beautiful and the lessons very helpful. It was a treat for Ann and me, especially since we are isolated from other missionaries for so many months out of the year, and it is good to get a fill-up from time to time.

“We camped our Mercedes Benz camper in the parking lot of the Bible School along with Jim and Dene Judd’s beautiful big Winnebago camper and the snazzy little Datsun pickup camper of Randy and Marty Judd. Despite the busy schedule of the lectureships, which featured speeches and panels from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. each day, and the evening lectures as well, Jim, Randy and I snatched some time to discuss the Lord’s work in Malawi and Rhodesia, while Dene, Marty and Ann had some good visits together as well. It was heartwarming to see them all again and to know that they will not be far from us as we are all striving together to carry the gospel to the African people.”

"Born Free"

After living in our wonderful, happy bush home for nine years, our place of stay was blessed with the birth of our fifth child, Kimberly. How happy the whole family was to welcome her. She weighed in at a "big" six pounds, 2 1/2 ounces and was really our first true Malawian, even though the other four had become more Malawian than American. John decided it was best for me to fly down to Lilongwe to wait for Kimberly to arrive. He didn't dare drive me down on the bumpy roads, otherwise she might be born prematurely. He drove on down later, leaving Henry to stay at the mission by himself since we all thought it would just be a short wait. It turned out that we had to wait for almost a month.

Early one morning on August 31, 1978 John drove me to the Kamuzu Central Hospital, which was almost new at that time. I had to walk up the flight of stairs to the labour and delivery room because the elevator was broken. I do believe that helped Kim to arrive more quickly! Nevertheless, she was worth every bit of it. John rushed to send a telegram to Henry, telling him that she had arrived and that we'd be back home soon. In the telegram he stated, "Mother and baby fine," but by the time Henry received the telegram it read, "Mother of five." So, for a while Henry thought he had five new brothers and sisters to welcome home!

They gave me a very nice private room. I was the only "mzungu" (white) woman having a baby that day. The nurses and midwife were all super nice to me. After three days, we paid \$28.00 to the hospital for our German gynecologist who was very good, even though I never understood a word he said, and he couldn't understand me. We also paid a grand total of \$6.00 for room and board and headed for the American embassy to apply for Kimberly's birth certificate and passport. We wanted to make



Kimberly Thiesen: "born free".

sure we could get her into the U.S.A. Then we went over to apply for her Malawian birth certificate from the Malawi officials. After we got our new gift back up north to the mission, we had many Africans come to see the little new mzungu. They rejoiced with us and told us our baby was "born free." They said this meant she was born during a time

when they had their own leader elected by themselves and that they were not under colonial rule any more. They were very excited about this and told us many times through the years that Kim had been born free.

Being lovers of children themselves, they were all very happy for us. They brought gifts of peanuts, one lady brought six eggs, another a bowl of sima flour, and one kind woman brought a gift of a few coins totalling twelve cents. We were so touched, because this was probably all the money she had. What was so

wonderful to us was that we had truly been accepted as their own and they loved us, even though we were from a totally different background and with a different colour of skin. Yes, God had been good to us and was helping us daily to adjust. Life was so good! It was just super!

I experience the “empty nest syndrome”

When Henry was 20 years old, and Michael was 18, just before we were due to go home on leave, they started talking about returning to the States together before we did and looking for jobs because they both wanted to buy a car. We agreed that maybe this was the best thing for them to do so that they could learn to manage a little on their own. We helped them get everything ready and their bags packed to go back to the States.

The loneliness almost overwhelmed me after they left. We were so used to their always being there keeping things active and alive at our house. I could barely cope. The place seemed



Our family had expanded to seven: Henry, Robin, Mark, Mike, Kimberly, Ann and John.

empty without them, even though we still had three kids at home. I would go out and look at their corn and popcorn gardens and cry because they were gone. They had always been out hoeing in them. I knew then exactly what the “empty nest syndrome” was. I was counting the days until I could get back home to them.

When Kimberly was about a year old, we headed back to the States to show off our new member of the family to the folks at home and to see our wonderful family there, as well as to take a much needed rest. While we were home on leave, our oldest son Henry married a lovely girl by the name of Pam McDowell, and she agreed she would be willing to go to the mission field with us. So we started planning our trip back.

Pam's initiation to Africa

When we reached Malawi with Henry and his new bride, everything went well at first on the trip north until we arrived at the border of the Northern Region. Then it was unbelievable. It seemed the skies decided to open up completely and let all the rains of heaven fall down on us. The roads that were so dry and dusty earlier in the day turned into a muddy gob. I was sure that we were going to stick our cars in those deep ruts never to be seen again. I felt I should try to make light of all this because it was Pam's first time in Africa, and I didn't want her discouraged. I failed, I'm sure.

As we approached a steep hill, I looked at the water-covered road and had a sinking feeling that we'd never be able to climb its slippery surface. Somehow we did, by the sheer brute force of all of us pushing. We literally pushed a car and a pickup up that mountain, all the while having mud by the tons thrown by the spinning tires into our faces and onto our clothes. When we reached the top, Pam, Robin and I were laughing hysterically at our desperate accomplishment. Never had anything been so hard for us as that effort. But Pam was still in good spirits, and we headed on our way again.

The roads were terrible, but we felt sure we had mastered the worst part—that was where we were wrong. We continued on slipping and sliding from side to side but managed to stay on the hump in the middle of the road. We were all worn out, but we knew that in another two or three hours we would be at the mission, and we were excited about that. Just as we were anticipating home and congratulating ourselves, we came upon a place where the road just disappeared! In place of the road there was a great chasm with a raging river thundering through it. We just couldn't believe it was happening! Here it was now dark and our petrol gauges were near the empty mark, and we were out in the middle of the dark African bush with no hotels within 200 miles. Then we remembered a Catholic mission that we had passed a few miles back, so we turned around and headed for it. We found a nice priest there who was very kind to us and took us all in for the night. The next morning he gave us a good breakfast and sold us enough petrol to reach home. We had to go another way to the mission, but we eventually arrived. My, did that mission look good!

Pam and Henry settled in well in the other house across the yard from us where the Andrew Conally family had originally lived. They had to do several repairs on it because the termites had been very active while we were home on leave. Pam was a good trooper, though, and didn't complain despite the fact that they had no hot water for most of the two years they were there. Henry stayed very busy directing the Bible correspondence courses which the church offered, attending meetings every weekend, carrying loads of preachers to help support the meetings in various places. In one meeting at Tombolombo village in the Mzimba District, he preached his first sermon to a crowd of over 500 men and women. The brethren were thrilled to see that a mzungu boy, whom they had watched grow up in Africa, was now able to preach the gospel, sharing the good news of Christ with them. Needless to say we were overjoyed to hear from our friends of the fine job he had done. After that he was preaching

regularly in meetings in various areas as well as at the mission.

Pam stayed extremely busy with her projects of quilt-making and embroidering everything that she thought needed decorating, clear down to handkerchieves and tea towels. She had half the women of Lubagha village employed on her sewing projects at the mission. The young girls loved working for her because she was so kind to them. They always had money to buy things they needed while she lived there. Pam also started a children's class and had 50 to 75 kids every time they met. They came from far and near to her class and even some grown women loved to sit in on her children's classes.

Our first grandchild

It was during those two years that we were blessed with our first beautiful grandchild, Trish. What a wonderful blessing!



Words cannot describe how happy we were to have her. She seemed to be the life of the mission. The Malawians loved her, too, even though she was a big show-off. She got to celebrate her first birthday with several little Malawi children present. They all looked so cute in their little party hats that Pam had brought from the States.

It was just great having Henry and Pam, and now Trish, in Malawi with us, as well as the rest of the kids. Michael had a job in the States and had stayed behind. I missed him terribly. The mission did not seem the

Trish, our first granddaughter, born in Malawi.



Henry, Pam and granddaughter Trish.

same with him gone. Then the problem was solved for me when Mike decided he would take a leave of absence from his job, come over to Malawi for the Summer and stay with us three months. We just counted the days until he could come. Finally, the day arrived, and we met him at the Mzuzu airport. Now our family was complete again. He spent the full three months living like Huck Finn again and going hunting daily.

Trip to Kasungu Game Park

The kids and I started putting the pressure on John to take a couple of days off so that we could go to Kasungu Game Park down in the middle of the country in the Central Region. He agreed it was time for some recreation, so I made reservations with the “boma” (government) to rent two of the tents for our family to stay in. We loaded all the things we would need, including food to cook because that would be less expensive than



Elephants in Kasungu Game Park.

eating in the single restaurant at the park.

From the moment we entered that very wild game reserve and began seeing Cape buffalo everywhere and elephants on all sides, I began to doubt this was going to be a fun time—at least for me since I'm pretty much of a coward. I remembered some Greek people who had shown us their Range Rover with the gaping holes in the radiator and hood, punched there by the tusks of a very unsociable elephant at the park. As the elephants looked us over that day, I could tell they were thinking, "You are in our territory now, and we are in charge."

Then one big bull elephant broke away from the herd and began slipping silently and swiftly through the forest alongside of us. Suddenly we realized that he was circling in behind us in order to "head us off at the pass!" We had nowhere to go, since it was a very small dirt road and the rest of the herd was blocking it to the front. We didn't dare honk at them to get out of our way. One big bull elephant threw his trunk into the air and trumpeted so loudly that I was absolutely terrified. Robin had no fear at all, but wanted to get a picture close up. Kim hid her face in my lap and I thought, if this is supposed to be fun, I don't want

any of it. We somehow made it back to the camp by John throwing the car into reverse and outrunning the elephant charging us from the woods by driving backwards at full speed.

Boy, did those tents at camp look flimsy after that experience! What had we let ourselves in for? That evening, John said, "We'll splurge tonight and eat at the park restaurant." We all agreed it would be nice to walk over to it instead of driving. As we entered, one of the waiters said, "You are not allowed to walk here, as it is not safe." So John walked back and got the car to park it in front of the restaurant. I really knew then that those elephants were not house pets.

I was already dreading going to bed in that tent. I would have preferred something like a bank vault with a cot in it, but the only thing to do was to make the best of a bad situation, or so it seemed. It became dark very early and we bedded down for the



Sign outside of restaurant on the Shire River.



Trish celebrates her first birthday in Malawi.

night—Mike, Robin, and Mark in one tent and John, Kim and I in another. As soon as we got stretched out, we began to hear hyenas near by in the bush. Would you believe our tent would not zip up! The zipper was broken! Kim absolutely refused to sleep on her cot. She had to sleep on mine with me. We had all of 20 inches between us.

In the middle of the night we heard a huge animal ripping up and munching grass about 12 inches from our ears through the wall of the tent. John shined his torch into the face of what seemed to us to be one of the world's largest elephants. He was only having a midnight snack. Then he ran his gigantic trunk in under the awning of the kids' tent and cleaned up the crumbs on the picnic table! I was so glad when daylight came so that I could see what I had to deal with. That morning, John and four of the children went out sightseeing and saw a beautiful leopard, but Kim and I refused to go because I felt I had had enough fun to do

me for awhile. I was so glad to get back to the mission that evening.

At the end of Michael's three month visit our daughter Robin decided she would go back to the States with him. She was 20 years old by now and wanted to find a job. They both packed their bags and went home—and it was time for me to be lonely again. But our God took good care of us and was with us daily, blessing us with good health and a good life.

At the Ambassador's house

We had many interesting things happen to us while we were in Malawi, that wonderful "warm heart of Africa." Each fourth of July the American ambassador to Malawi held a big celebration to remember our Independence Day. Every American in the country received an invitation to come, so we decided one year it would be great if we could go and enjoy this annual event. It truly was an experience that we thoroughly enjoyed. It was great just being with fellow Americans and hearing that beautiful



Ambassador Trail and wife welcome Beth Ann Albright, Kate Dalum, and Kim Thiesen (right).

accent that was so familiar and dear to our ears. I never realized before how much I loved our country and language.

The ambassador was friendly and kind to everyone, making us all feel welcome. Their beautiful home could only be described as fabulous. It was large enough to house several families. The swimming pool was gorgeous, dazzling blue, and large enough to have a huge pool party. All of the guests' children there had plenty to do that day. Besides the pool for those who wanted to swim, there were organized games of all sorts, and tennis. There was a monstrous cake for the celebration as well, with a tiny American flag on each guest's piece. One lady sang the National Anthem, which brought tears to the eyes of most Americans there. It truly had been a memorable day for us.

Malawi preachers

I would like to mention a few of the Malawian preachers John worked with during our years in Africa. Of course it would not be possible to name them all because there were 50 full-time supported men as well as hundreds of self-supporting ones serving congregations throughout the 300 mile Northern Region where John did most of his travels.

Robertson Mvula was John's interpreter and right-hand man for the first two years we were in Malawi. After the two years, when John had learned enough of the Chitumbuka language to start preaching in it himself, Robertson was sent as an evangelist to the Mbarachanda area. It was through Robertson that John learned the areas of the Northern Region and the locations where all the churches were meeting.

Amin Harawa, who lived near the mission, is one of the original full-time men, serving the churches in the Henga Valley where the mission is located. He travelled often with both James Judd and John in the earlier years. In an article about this exemplary Christian gentleman, John wrote:

"His hair is white these days, and he walks with a stoop and

wheezing breath. Some days he is not able to leave his house when the growth on his neck becomes swollen—keloids caused by a splash burn from molten copper in his youth as a worker on a smelter in South Africa. But for over 30 years now Amin Harawa has been an inspiration to Christians in the Northern Region of Malawi, Africa.

“His quiet, gentle dignity and humble demeanor coupled with an amiable good nature are qualities that have endeared him to all who know him. Amin is unassuming and slow to speak, but when he preaches, people always carry away something good for their lives. His sermons are not long, but they are beautifully logical and pointed. This is why he has been chosen to be a full-time evangelist working among congregations in the Henga Valley.

“During the past 10 years Amin has been boarding-master for the preacher training schools held at Lubagha Mission every dry season. He is responsible for feeding and housing hundreds of preacher students. One year he took care of 930 students during the six month dry season. He is a valuable worker in Malawi and a living example of the Christian life to the people.”

Solium Zimba is a gospel preacher among the Tonga people of the Nkhata Bay District which runs for 90 miles along the shore of Lake Malawi. In the first few years we were there, John often travelled with him and other preachers among the Tongas, who speak a different tongue. Solium operated his own preacher training school at his home at Dambolitali for several years. In recent years, he has been one of the staff instructors at the Mzuzu Bible College built by James Judd. Solium is also a talented song-writer who has written many of the songs in a Chitumbuka hymn book popularly used by churches of Christ in Malawi.

Miston Chilambo, another of brother Judd's instructors at the Mzuzu Bible College, in earlier days was one of the full-time evangelists travelling with John. He is noted for his extensive knowledge of the Old Testament which he gained in his youth as a cow-herder. While tending his father's cattle, he resolved to

study the whole Bible through, starting from the beginning. This he did, and his thorough study of the Old Testament made him the most feared by the 7th Day Adventists because he could show clearly from the Bible that the Law of Moses with its Sabbath was done away in Christ.

Solium and Miston often showed up in John's reports home. In one of these reports, John wrote:

"With the rainy season drawing nearer, we have been kept busy fulfilling Bible School commitments before the downpour begins. Since I last wrote you, I have helped with two more Bible schools, one on the lakeshore at Chifira Sekera, and another at Chitipa at the northernmost border of Malawi. Camping with the family in the big Mercedes Benz camper in Chifira village at the lake, I was one of three teachers in a two week school lasting seven hours a day. Solium Zimba taught a Bible survey, while Miston Chilambo's subject was, "The New Testament Church" and mine "The Kingdom of God and the Church." Despite the intense heat on the lakeshore at this time of the year, the brethren showed a good interest and asked many questions. In fact, their questions sometimes consumed almost as much class time as the subjects prepared by the teachers did. In the evenings, we showed Bible filmstrips both at this village and in the surrounding areas. The result of this film work was five baptized, including one school teacher at the neighboring village of Chituka."

Besides the men being supported through us at Lubagha Mission, John often worked with preachers receiving their support directly from congregations in the United States. Two of these were Robetcher Sisya and R. G. Chirwa, who both previously served as evangelists in Tanzania and who continued to be helped by their American supporters when they returned to Malawi. Robetcher is an older man working with several congregations and preachers along the lakeshore from Chilumba to Old Sarawe. R. G. Chirwa is both a successful farmer and preacher at Tombolombo who works with many other preachers

in the area. John has also travelled with Robert Waller and Bud Hales, preachers from the College Hill Church of Christ in North Richland Hills, Texas when they were sent over to Malawi to visit the ministers and congregations being served by Sisya and Chirwa.

I wish it were possible to tell you of all the faithful, dedicated preachers John has worked with, but that would make this book too big. These are just a few of many that we have had the privilege and pleasure of knowing.

Our American Visitors

One year the preacher from Lebanon, Missouri, Wayne Deffenbaugh, came over for five weeks to help John preach throughout the North. John had him booked for the full five weeks. One of the meetings where they went was at Chitipa, a hundred and seventy-five miles away. The road was indescribably bad and took a lot of careful maneuvering to drive over it. The last day of the meeting was on Sunday. John and Wayne asked the brethren to please try to end the meeting early in the afternoon so that they could reach home before dark on account of the road conditions.



Wayne Deffenbaugh pays a 5-week visit to Malawi churches.

It didn't quite work out that way, since Africans do not get in any hurry. It was already late by the time they left. Meanwhile it started to rain and the road got muddier and muddier. Darkness came on, and they were still trying to get down that deep-rutted, muddy road after nightfall. Then, lo and behold, the truck's lights went out! The back of the pickup was full of African preachers all getting soaked to their skins, but they were still singing and as happy as they could be. Somehow, they had to attempt to get on home with or without lights. John always carried his torch (flashlight) with him on these journeys, so Wayne took it and flashed the light out the window onto the road while John drove slowly on home. Eventually in came several very tired, hungry and muddy travelers. However, their mission had been accomplished, and they felt that they had done a profitable work for their Lord. I hustled into the kitchen and prepared food for their empty tummies.

First visit of an elder

One year we had Frank Harbin, one of our elders from Pleasant Valley, come to Malawi to visit us, although he was only able to stay with us for two days that time. A funny thing happened during his short visit. John took him to a gospel meeting in a village on the lakeshore. If the African ladies get excited or extremely happy about something, they make a strange yodeling sound. During the service one lady got happy, and she made her yodeling sound. Frank had never heard anything like it and didn't know what it was, so after the service he asked John, "What kind of bird was that?" John laughed and told him, "That was not a bird; that was a woman." We often enjoyed watching the expressions on our American visitors' faces when they ran into such strange cultural differences for the first time.

Preacher Training Schools start

After many years of being in the country and baptizing so many people into Christ, John, Passwell Msowoya, Chironga Mhango and other Malawi preachers decided to begin a preacher



Frank Harbin, elder from Pleasant Valley (right), visited us in Malawi twice.

training school on Lubagha mission to give both our supported and self-supporting preachers some in-depth training in order to help them in their day-to-day preaching in the villages and in their teaching the churches they served. In this way the churches in their areas would be strengthened because of better equipped preachers. They would become better able to give an answer to every one who asked them about the hope that was in them.

The more John and the native preachers discussed the idea, the more excited they became. In this way the annual dry-season preacher training schools were started at Lubagha Mission. They decided to call two men from each church, paying their bus fares to the school and back home again, as well as feeding and housing them during the week they were there. The Malawians showed themselves to be eager to hear God's word. They would study for one week, day and night, and then return to their homes. Then another group would come to take their place. It started out

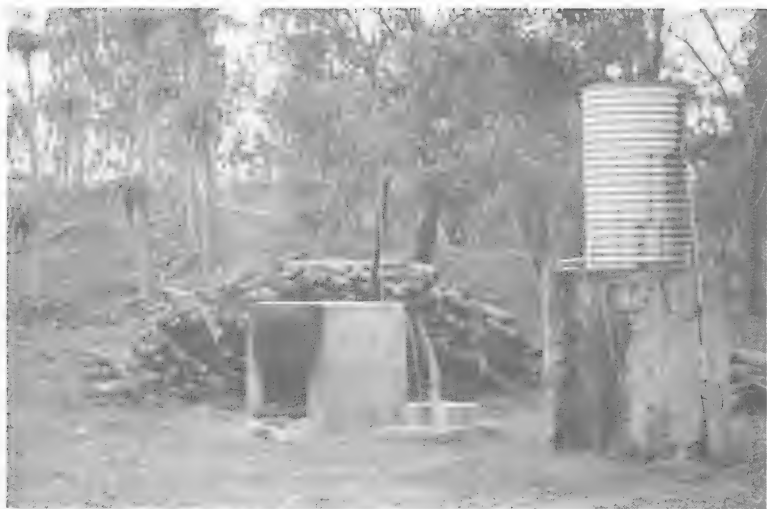
a huge success and still is up to this time. The schools began in 1983 with attendances of around 300 coming for the one-week sessions throughout the dry season and continued to grow until 700 to 900 are attending yearly.

By the end of the schools, all the teachers were totally exhausted, but with a very happy exhaustion. They knew much good had been accomplished through their labours. Pleasant Valley, our sponsoring congregation, who along with other supporting congregations footing the bills for all these schools, were very excited and happy too. Pleasant Valley decided to send Gary Hampton, their preacher, over to help teach in the schools, along with Frank Harbin. My, were we excited to have visitors from home!

Visitors from Pleasant Valley

I started planning what kind of menu to prepare for them. Since I was greatly limited on what I could find to buy, I more or less just decided which days to have meat and rice or meat and potatoes. We had cabbage salad every day, but Gary and Frank were very good house guests and never complained one time. Frank got to celebrate his birthday while he was there, and we had a small party for him. Both of them really seemed to enjoy their classes. When the students took a break for tea, the preachers would completely surround Gary asking him Bible questions one right after the other. He could barely get to the house for a cup of cocoa. I'm sure Gary and Frank thought it truly a preacher's paradise.

We had a very embarrassing thing happen. The Rhodesian boiler decided it was time to give up the ghost, just as we had visitors. This meant no hot water for anything—not even baths. The Rhodesian boiler is our hot water system at the mission, and it works great until it sprouts a hole in the drum, and then we have trouble. The drum is built into a brick casing with room underneath to build a fire. Another drum with cold water sits on top and feeds into the hot water drum as the water is used. When the



Rhodesian boiler "gives up the ghost."

hot water drum sprouts holes from continued use, rust and the ever-burning fire under it, it starts leaking and puts out the fire.

Something of the sort happened and we certainly didn't want to send back home to the States a dirty preacher and elder. We knew that if we sent them home dirty, their wives would never let them come again. So we merely heated water on the stove and carried it to the tub. Needless to say, their baths were shallow, but they were clean. After three weeks, it was time for them to head back to the United States. How I hated to see them go! It was like having a part of the U.S.A. right there with us and then to have it suddenly snatched away. But all good things end eventually, and we had to let them go. We, as well as the Malawi brethren, truly had been uplifted by their visit.

The Mancills come over

In later years we started having more visitors coming from the States than during the earlier years. John and Clarissa Mancill came to stay three weeks, and we had a wonderful visit

with them. The two Johns would go out from the mission every day preaching in the villages in the Nkamanga Valley and come back after dark tired but very happy with their day's preaching. Clarissa and I stayed home, taught the kids' school each day and cooked a good supper for the two preachers when they arrived home. One thing that was so exciting about the Mancills' visit was that they brought over with them two suitcases completely filled with American treats. There were all kinds of delicious candies, including Hershey bars, plain and with almonds, many different kinds of cake mixes and tinned meats of every description. It was simply wonderful! Maybe a person couldn't understand this if he had never experienced shortages of so many basic items such as salt, sugar, cooking oils, flour and many other things that we take for granted in the United States.

It seems that it was only yesterday that the kids and I sorted through all those fine goodies and put them in our cupboards to enjoy through the months ahead. Mark and Kim were very excited about two new pairs each of tennis shoes.

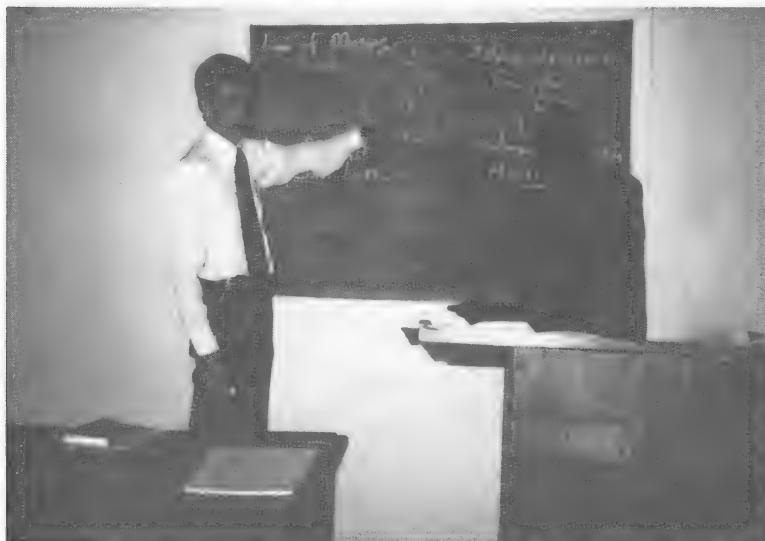


John and Clarissa Mancill from Theodore, Alabama.

More visits from Pleasant Valley

We also had Gary Hampton and Ben Giddens come over another year to help out in the Bible schools. Gary felt as though he were just coming back home again. The Malawians counted him as one of themselves, as they did John, more like a Tumbuka than an American. Ben enjoyed his time there and was such a fine teacher in the school. After he had finished his teaching for the day, he would spend some time sitting in the old wicker chair under the shade tree relaxing and admiring the magnificent mountains surrounding the lovely Henga Valley where we lived.

The only sad thing about our visitors coming was the time of their leaving. It seemed that the time always went too fast for us, and then we were all alone again. The Africans also were unhappy to see their new American Christian friends leave. We could always handle their leaving better if we only had a few months left to stay ourselves. But if there still remained another year or so, we knew we were going to be really homesick.



Gary Hampton, preacher from Pleasant Valley,
training preachers during the dry season.

Then in the year 1989 we had the grand news that Leroy McGaughy, one of our elders at Pleasant Valley along with his wife, Suzanne, and Gary were coming to visit us for two or three weeks. Leroy and Gary would be teaching in the schools and Suzanne would be teaching the preachers' wives each day. The only thing that had me worried was how Suzanne would take living in the African bush for three weeks. I didn't really know her likes or dislikes. I wondered if she would be a finicky type person, since I had not been with her that much, except at worship services when we visited Pleasant Valley. I thought, "Well, we'll soon find out if she can take the rougher side of life where spiders, scorpions, fire ants and sometimes even snakes come into the house." I was afraid she might not last but would catch the first plane out of there for home.

I told my house boy, Yosefe, to help me make everything extra special because an American lady was coming, being sure to dust in every corner, in order to prepare as well as we could for the McGaughys. I knew Gary could take anything. Even the



Leroy McGaughy, elder from Pleasant Valley, answering Bible questions at night session.



Suzanne McGaughy taught 52 preachers' wives at Lubagha Mission with Kemelton interpreting.

water never bothered his stomach.

We all pitched in, cleaning and dusting and buying various grocery items we could find in Mzuzu to get ready for the American lady's arrival. Little did I know she would be one of the toughest ladies around, able to handle anything. After making everything ready, we drove down the 300 miles to Lilongwe to pick up our visitors at Kamuzu International Airport. As they descended from the plane, I had butterflies in my tummy. Would these people be able to stand our way of life for three weeks? I knew Leroy was an executive in the International Paper Company in Mobile, and I knew they weren't used to living in an African village. But then I thought to myself, they are Christians, so they can take it. We had a good lunch at the airport and then headed back on the long, long road to the mission deep in the north.

So far the visitors seemed to be doing great. We stopped on the way to pick up one of our African preachers by the name of

Mlozi Banda, who was also a former member of the Malawi Parliament, because he wanted to go with us in order to attend the Bible school at the mission.

As we drew closer to the north, there was road work being done, and by this time it was dark as only it can be in the continent of Africa. Well, we somehow took a wrong detour and headed down into a deep, deep, ravine. It looked as if the road would stop at any minute with no way to turn around in that scary place. John, Leroy and Mlozi had gone on ahead, unaware of our disappearance into nowhere. Gary and Suzanne, the Albright children, and Dr. Dalum's daughter, Kate, were all riding with me. Gary directed me to back the car up, but the old dilapidated, worn-out Peugeot kept dying as I tried to do so. I was afraid John would come back looking for us and would pass us by, not knowing what had happened to us. Suzanne and Gary told the kids all to get out as I backed the car up the hill in the dark to level ground. We finally got up the hill and turned around and headed on toward the mission. That didn't seem to phase Suzanne at all,



Gary giving student some pointers on sermon outlining.

so I knew she would make it after all.

One thing neither Suzanne nor I liked one little bit happened as we reached the Northern Region near the Zambian border. We were stopped on the highway by Malawian soldiers with automatic weapons in their hands. Mine and Suzanne's eyes were as big as saucers as we gazed fearfully at those menacing looking machine guns. We tried to look as innocent as we could, and I guess we succeeded because we weren't shot. A soldier asked us who we were and where we were going. We told him we were from the Church of Christ and that I was the wife of the missionary of Lubagha Mission who was in the Nissan pickup ahead of us which had just passed through this same roadblock. The soldier then told us that he also was a member of the Church of Christ, and he asked us to pray for him. That indeed was good news! We lost our fear, our knees stopped shaking and we went on our way.

The next day after our arrival at the mission, we took Gary and the McGaughys to a meeting on the lakeshore, and they all thoroughly enjoyed it. The next two weeks were filled with Bible schools and meetings and Suzanne teaching the ladies. They all loved her lessons.

One thing Suzanne seemed to be excited about was the lemon tree in the back of our house. Every day she hurried out to the tree to pick some of the gorgeous yellow fruit and start squeezing. She kept everyone's thirst quenched with her lemonade for the next two weeks. I was sure she would take on the colour of one of those bright yellow lemons, but she didn't.

Trip to Nyika Game Park

At the end of their stay, we decided they could not leave Malawi without seeing the beautiful Nyika Game Park, so we packed up food and headed for the chalets that we had reserved for us. My, were we all excited! I so wanted them to see Malawi's wild game and how lovely that park was.



Students of Preacher Training School with Gary Hampton and Leroy and Suzanne McGaughy.

The children, Suzanne and I decided we would all ride in the back of the Nissan pickup on the 90-mile dirt road there. We would feel the fresh air blowing in our hair and faces, and it would just be a fun time for all. I didn't realize what the red dust of the road would do to us. I can't begin to describe in words how we looked when we reached the chalets. We looked like a new type of creature on this earth. I was surprised they even let us in. Oh, how we were looking forward to a good hot bath! But the worst was yet to come. There was no water in our chalet at all! Not even cold. The engine that pumped the water was broken, and they were waiting for parts ordered from London, England. What were we to do? It seemed to be quite a way to carry water by bucketfuls from the little man-made lake, especially since it was down the hill. But we had to have the water, so Gary, Leroy, John and the cook for the chalet carried our water up the hill for us to have a small bath and to flush the chim (toilet). So much for the big, deep, hot, bubble bath I had envisioned. We had red dirt in our ears, our hair, and our nostrils, not

to mention on our bodies. We needed an ocean to swim in to get the dirt off us, not a mere bucketful. But we still all managed to have a great time and to see lots of God's magnificent animals and His beautiful creation. Suzanne continued to find red dirt on her even after she returned to the States.

We found out that Leroy and Suzanne were able to cope as well as any visitors that we had ever had and that Suzanne could take anything. We were so sorry to see them leave, but they had to get back to their work at home and Pleasant Valley needed their preacher and elder back. But we truly had been uplifted and blessed by their coming.

Teaching African women

Suzanne carried home with her the fascinating experience of having taught God's word to women of a totally different culture. As I taught ladies' Bible classes through the years at different times, the women seemed so eager to learn. They would walk for miles when they knew I was coming. At first I found it difficult to go through an interpreter, but later it became easier. My greatest problem in teaching African women was trying to find examples to make a point. I couldn't use the example of watching TV all the time instead of coming for worship services, because they didn't have electricity in the villages, much less television. In fact, most of them didn't even know what one was. I couldn't talk about being tied up with housework to the neglect of spiritual things, because they only had a dried mud floor to sweep and no furniture to dust.

At different times, the preacher in a certain area would come and ask me to teach the girls on purity. So many of them came up pregnant before marriage. I found my best example was a new dress of crimpalene, which they prized highly. I would ask them if they went to a store to buy a new dress, what would they do if the clerk brought out a soiled, ragged dress with holes in it. Would they buy it? They would all shout, "Iai! (No!) We want a new one." So I told them that was how they needed to go to

their marriage, clean, new and very pure. This was how Christ wanted us to be. I always loved teaching the young women best. The children also just loved Bible classes. They could sit for hours and not get tired, just drinking in every word that was told them about Yesu (Jesus). There were some of the sweetest little kids I had ever seen. Our daughter-in-law Pam loved teaching the kids. She would sit in the shade of a tree with 50 to 75 children around her, all eager to be taught. Even some of their mothers gathered with them every week to hear Pam. They all loved her, too, for her kindness to them.

Visitors from Capetown

We were also very fortunate to have Roger Dickson come from Cape Town, South Africa to teach in our preacher training schools. He was a tireless worker. He could teach all day long for six to eight hours without seeming to tire. The African preachers really enjoyed having him, too. One year he brought his wife, Martha, and his two daughters who all seemed to love



Roger Dickson comes from Cape Town, South Africa to teach in our preacher training schools.

Malawi. Roger was working as a missionary in Cape Town and conducted a correspondence course on leadership training available to students throughout southern and central Africa.

Visit of the Haslams

Charles and Elizabeth Haslam were other very welcome visitors to Malawi whom we grew to love. They operated a large bookstore in St. Petersburg, Florida where Charles was an elder in the Northside Church of Christ, a longtime supporting congregation of the work of the Lord in Malawi. Charles taught men's classes, while Elizabeth loved to teach the ladies. Their zeal for the Lord was an inspiration to all of us. In 1983 they came over on another visit to the mission. We were shocked, however, to learn that on their return to America, both were hospitalized at the same time with severe cases of malaria, which tragically took the life of brother Haslam. Reporting on Charles' death, John



Kim made hats for workers at her birthday party.



Kim at Kemelton's house selecting a sima patty for super.

wrote in his newsletter:

"However, 1983 was also a time of tragedy for us and the Malawi church because of the untimely death of Charles Haslam. Brother Haslam was one of the elders of the Northside congregation in St. Petersburg, Florida. With his wife, Elizabeth, he devoted a week in Malawi during

August helping us in gospel

meetings and Bible schools. It was their third visit to Malawi to encourage the churches. But after returning to America, both Charles and Elizabeth came down with a severe case of malaria. Elizabeth survived, though hospitalized, but due to complications Charles did not. It was a time of shock and mourning for all of us over here. Both of these fine Christians and the congregation they serve have been long and faithful supporters of the Malawi effort."

My radio interview on MBC

During one of our trips to Blantyre, Mark said he wanted to go by the bookstore where Peter Mhone, one of our preachers,



Mark checking out our banana supply.

worked. He was a good friend of ours, and Mark had not seen him in a while. Little did we know what he had in store for us. He said he wanted to take Mark, Kim and me on a tour of the national studios of the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). John was also invited, but he didn't want to go (I later found out he was afraid the station staff would want to interview him over the air). I thought this sounded like a lot of fun. We had never been to the radio station there, which serves all of Malawi and has an international service as well. He took us around and introduced us to many of the people in the station, and then they took us to a small room where they were doing a show called "The Morning Basket." They said they wanted to interview me because I was a missionary's wife, plus they wanted to know about the home schooling of my children. I almost had a nervous breakdown, but I just smiled and said, "sure."



John examines a village water pump.

They asked me how I liked Malawi and how long we planned to stay there. I told them we hoped to stay until we retired. Then they asked me why I didn't enroll my children in the local schools. I replied that I had them on American courses so that they would be on the same level with children in the States. Then they asked me, "What are you doing for Malawi?" I said, "We are telling your people about God so they can be better people." I also told them that we were helping people to get to the hospital and were giving them medicine when they were sick. After a lot of questions, the interview was over, and we went on our way. Many of the Christians over Malawi had heard the interview and felt that it was very good advertisement for the church.



John with Passwell Msowoya and Chironga Muhango, teachers of the Lubagha preacher training schools.

Saying Goodbye to the "Warm Heart of Africa"

It seemed the years were going so fast and most all of our children except Kim, our Africa-born daughter, were all back in the States. It was becoming harder and harder to leave our children and grandchildren behind while we worked in Africa. It seemed our hearts wanted to be in both places at once. We planned on staying in Africa until John retired, but we were still fighting a terrible home-sickness for our family. So after discussing it with our elders, they agreed we could live six months in Africa during the dry season conducting the preacher training schools and the other six months reporting and preaching in the States. It sounded good to us. We could have our cake and eat it too!

So we packed our bags again in May 1991 and headed back to Africa, eager to return to the mission, our work and our friends. What we did not know was that the course of our lives would be completely changed within a mere two weeks as a result of a major heart attack. When we arrived at Lilongwe, I developed a back problem, and the doctor wouldn't let me drive for one week. But finally the week was over, and we loaded up all our katundu, except for the new freezer that had come in from South Africa and was being held in Customs at the airport. John said he would ask Kemelton to come back down with him to get it. It was great to reach the mission, see all our good friends and get everything unloaded. We were tired but happy to be back. Our home looked beautiful to us. The next day, John and Kemelton headed back to Lilongwe to pick up the freezer, but Kim and I stayed behind to unpack things and hang Kim's new curtains in her room.

Heart attack

The next evening after dark, I got excited because I saw John's pickup headlights coming down our road. We could get settled in now. But as I took a flashlight out to meet him, he said he was terribly sick and weak. So I helped him into the house, and he went straight to bed. He was sick all night with stomach pain, so the next morning he asked me to take him to the hospital. There was so much fog that I had a hard time seeing the road, but we finally made it to the Ekwendeni hospital. Dr. John Dorward from Scotland looked John over and asked all kinds of questions and told us to wait at his house to see if the medicine he gave him would help. He didn't want us to go back to the mission in case it was John's heart. I just knew it could not be that as John had never had heart trouble before.



Drs. John and Isbell Dorward with children David and Mairi — The doctors the Lord worked through to save John's life.

As I drove the few hundred yards to the doctor's house, I had to stop the car so that John could vomit. He also broke out in a cold, clammy sweat and I just knew he had picked up some kind of bug. As we entered the house, though, John was in excruciating pain. Isbell (the doctor's wife), who was also a doctor, called her husband to come. She was sure John was having a heart attack. Our good doctor ran up and positioned John on

the short sofa, propping his feet up so that his head was down hill. But he couldn't find his blood pressure or his pulse.

It seemed that all the staff at the Ekwendeni hospital, doctors, nurses, and others came to help. Kim and I looked on helplessly. Kim started to cry and I was just numb. At that moment, I just wanted home and my family. The doctor worked with John for awhile and gave him an injection of morphine to ease his agonizing pain. John did not have a clue that he was having a heart attack. He still thought it was his stomach. After a while, the doctor took me into the bedroom and told me, "Your husband is having a rather large heart attack." I just looked at him, speechless. Here we were thousands of miles from home, deep in the African bush, and my dear husband was having a major heart attack. I was so scared! I just couldn't believe this was happening. After an hour or two, Dr. Dorward said he would move John down to the hospital. This was a bush hospital and in no way resembled what we were used to in the U.S.A. There was no private room for John and no cardiac ward. The only place available was a tiny room at the maternity ward. As they carried John in through the ward with all the African ladies in their beds with tiny babies, John was a strange sight to see. For one thing, he was a man in a maternity ward, plus he was white on top of that. You could just hear the thoughts of those African ladies (even though in Chitumbuka), "What is a mzungu doing here, and he a man?" But they found a small room for him and put him in it. The bed was more like a hammock than a hospital bed. There was no raising or lowering of it except by putting bricks under the legs at the foot or head. The floor was of gray cement, and there was a very small wood table by the bed. They brought me a wooden straight back chair to sit on.

The doctor said he needed to do an EKG on John but had no machine. So they found someone to drive to Mzuzu to St. John's Hospital 15 miles away to borrow their machine. After they returned with it and did the EKG, the doctor told me that John

had a lot of heart damage and that the next 48 hours or so would be critical. If he could survive that long, he had a chance. Oh, how my heart ached! I couldn't picture life without him. We had been married since I was 16, and we had had such a wonderful life serving God together in a foreign land. I depended on him for everything. He had helped me so much spiritually over the years. He was my rock and my stability in all things. I didn't feel I could raise Kim alone. But I knew it was a really bad heart attack with very few medical facilities available. However, I also knew that God was there and that He had given us the best doctor in Malawi for this crisis.

That night, I slept on the floor in the corner of John's room, and the doctor even slept at the hospital in his office to keep an eye on John all through the night. He did this for the next two weeks. He also put a nurse in John's room 24 hours a day for the entire time he was there. The room had so much to be desired in a material sense, but the TLC more than made up for it. We had never experienced such kindness in a hospital before. That night, I called our children in the States and gave them the terrible news, and they called Pleasant Valley for me. At that time, so many prayers started to rise to Heaven along with mine. I also called Lendal and Peggy Wilks, our dear friends at Namikango Mission, and they left at 4:00 A.M. the next day, travelling non-stop the 500 miles to be with me. I could never describe the happiness I had when I saw their dear faces. They brought Beth Anne Albright to be with Kim while they stayed at the mission for two weeks taking care of our affairs for us and also repacking all of my things to take back to America.

The next day after John's heart attack, his heart went crazy again. The doctor called me to a room away from John and told me he did not have the medicine John needed. I thought I was already numb, but I really got scared when I heard that. John was now having dark spots appear in front of his eyes. I began to pray as I had never prayed before and as we went back into John's



Lendal and Peggy Wilks drove 500 miles to help me after John's heart attack.

room, he seemed to improve immediately. His heart had started a more steady beat. The doctor told me that God had more work for John to do or he wouldn't have made it.

Brother Jim Judd had just arrived the night before from America. I knew he was terribly tired, but I called him at Mzuzu and told him what had happened. I told him that we needed medicine from Lilongwe, 300 miles away. He just jumped into his car and took off like a bolt of lightning for Lilongwe. He was back before sundown with the much-needed medicine, along with a heart monitor and a defibrillator in case John's heart stopped, borrowed from Kamuzu Hospital at Lilongwe. Jim also brought an electric blanket for John's bed, an electric heater to keep him warm and many things he thought would make John more comfortable. I really realized that day how wonderful and valuable friends are, especially brothers and sisters in Christ. I don't know what I would have done without all of our friends pitching in.



Jim and Kathy Albright, fellow missionaries with Lendal and Peggy Wilks at Namikango Mission.

A sad farewell

After two weeks of being in the maternity wing (with no baby born), John was transferred up to the doctor's house. Our doctor was so good to us. Both he and his wife refused to let us go back to the mission on account of the distance. They wanted to keep an eye on John. We stayed two more weeks with them, and then they took us to the Mzuzu airport where we would catch a plane to Blantyre. Our dear friend Kemelton Harawa came in from the mission to see us off. Jim Judd brought his teachers and a group of his students from the Mzuzu Bible School to bid us goodbye. They had a very heart-touching prayer in our behalf just outside the airport terminal building. As I sat in that little airport I wondered, will I ever be back here again? But I was so thankful to God because He had spared my husband's life. They



John and I with Louise and Doyle Gilliam at Namikango Mission following John's heart attack.

called our flight, and we boarded the plane for Blantyre where we stayed with the Wilks and the Albrights for another month until John was able to fly to the States. Our doctor and his family escorted us to Amsterdam, Holland where they caught another plane and went to their home in Scotland as we continued on to the U.S.A.

We realized that all our years of being missionaries were over, and we would now be living in the States where we would have to readjust to a modern way of life again. We had planned that we would stay in Africa until we were forced to retire.

I wondered to myself alone, what would our life be like in the rich country of America again? Would John ever be able to preach again? Would he be happy in the U.S.A.? I knew how much he loved preaching God's word to such thirsty souls as we had found in Africa. As I said earlier on in this book, living in Malawi was a preacher's paradise.

Over the years we've had so many people say to us, "I don't



John and I.

see how you do it. How can you do without electricity? A telephone, modern conveniences?" Those are very easy to do without when you consider all the blessings you receive by living in a country where the people are hungering and thirsting after God's word. We found that material blessings are not the keys to happiness. Many Africans have little of this world's goods but seem to be some of the happiest people we've ever known. So, I want to encourage any woman out there with a husband who wants to do mission work to give it a try. You'll love it and will be blessed more than you ever thought possible.



Our granddaughter Trish, still remembering Malawi, dressed in a native costume for a school program and took first prize!

Epilogue

After coming back to the States, we stayed at our home in Buffalo, Missouri for one year while John was recuperating from his heart attack, and then moved to Mobile, Alabama to work with the Pleasant Valley Church of Christ. Here John worked with the church in its local programs for 4 1/2 years as well as serving as coordinator for the mission effort in Malawi. He continued to raise funds for Malawi and reported to supporters of Bob and Flo Calderwood, the present missionaries at Lubagha Mission. At this present time (1998) we are now back home in Buffalo, where John is preaching for the congregation on West Dallas Street. He is also still reporting to the Missouri churches on behalf of the Calderwoods' work in Malawi.

Our oldest son, Henry, is a deputy sheriff in Buffalo, Missouri and lives there with his wife, Pam, and their three daughters, Trish, Ashley, and Haley. Our second son, Michael, is an auditor for the State of Missouri. He and his wife, Lisa have two children, Aaron and Brooke, and live near Buffalo.

Our daughter, Robin Ann, is education specialist for the Dallas County Soil and Water Conservation District and lives with her husband, Jason Dibben and two sons, Jordan and Tyler near Buffalo. Our youngest son, Mark, is preparing to return to Ukraine where he had previously served as a missionary for one year. On that tour he married Era Evanova, a Ukrainian girl who was one of the members of the congregation he served in Bela Tserkva, and then they returned to the U.S.A. in order for Mark to complete his Master's degree in Bible at Harding Graduate School. Their supporting congregation, the College Hill Church of Christ of North Richland Hills, Texas will be sending them to Ukraine shortly to work with one of the new congregations there.

Meanwhile, our younger daughter, Kim ("born free"), is in her Junior year at Harding Christian University in Searcy,

Arkansas, studying to work in health services.

What we are most grateful for is that all our children and their spouses are faithful Christians in the congregations where they worship. This is the greatest joy and blessing of all to us. We believe that the nightly Bible studies and prayers we had with our children in our home throughout their growing up years in Malawi contributed most of all to make this a reality. We also have a special bond between us which, I feel, has come from having shared many interesting and unusual experiences in a remote village in a far-away land in Africa where we had grown very dependent on one another. The impression that those beautiful-hearted Malawians have left on us we can never forget. We give thanks to God for having allowed us to serve such loveable people for some 23 years.